

虎虎 Torako
Illustration 逢坂望美

中二病
でも

恋
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Torako

I'm doing my best to make this a wonderful work like the anime, so I'd appreciate it if you could view it kindheartedly as you read this work.

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「私くに貴方の恋人を下さい！」

Please hand over your lover!



Let's have some fun!

「楽しく
いこうねっ!」

虎虎 Torako
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Chapter 1: The Prologue Has Been Abandoned!

“Um, Rikka-san? You seem to be in a great mood so it’s hard to ask, but that seems heavy: let me carry it.”

“Sure. Also, it’s not Rikka-san. Rikka.”

Takanashi Rikka-san’s – I mean, Rikka’s – happy smile turned into a pout. As usual, her face changes when I call her that.

September 1st.

Yesterday was the last day of summer vacation – today’s the day of the school’s opening ceremony.

Since Rikka said she wanted to go to school together today, we’re going to school together.

Since the day I confessed, excluding the time when we were late, this is first time that the two of us are going to school together. To get to Rikka’s apartment from my house, I would have to walk past the school gates.

If I may say so myself, walking past the school so that we could go to school together is really stupid, but since it was our first time, I ended up agreeing to it.

And, well, I’ve always wanted to go to school together!

While having such thoughts, I turned towards Rikka and asked, “Anyway, what’s that?”

Her happy smile instantly returned.

“A present,” she happily replied as she stared at what she was embracing.

That – Rikka was carefully embracing a large rabbit doll.

I’ve seen something similar to this blue rabbit somewhere before. It looks like Rikka made it herself.

“I wanted to show it to you first Yuuta. Thoughts?”

“Rikka, you made that, right? Yeah, it’s extremely cute!”

“... Cute?”

“Yeah? It’s cute, isn’t it?”

“...This is the first time Yuuta’s called me cute.”

“.....”

What an unexpected response!

Then again, it’s true that I usually praise her as the strongest or the coolest.

While I had called her cute once before, back when we were on our first date, since I didn’t manage to say it properly back then I guess it didn’t count...

Wait, wasn’t I talking about the doll!?

Still, to have called the doll cute without having properly told Rikka that she was cute, just how worthless was I!?

“Err, ah... that, wait. Please wait. Certainly, that doll is cute too. That doll is cute, though... Rikka’s even cuter!”

I’ve been behaving recklessly this morning.

“Huh!? Yu-Yuuta, what’s with you all of a sudden!?”

“N, nothing! Wasn’t it really strange that I haven’t been calling you cute even though I’ve called the doll cute!?”

“Well...! It, it’s fine! This doll contains my soul so talking about it the same as talking about me!”

“I, I see! Then Rikka’s the first I’ve called cute! I’m glad!”

“Ugh... Devilish Truth Stare • Sealed Form – perfect complete activation!”

And.

Being unable to endure it, Rikka hid her blushing face behind the huge rabbit doll, abruptly ending the conversation.

If I had gotten any more out-of-control, I'm not sure what other weird stuff I would have said, so I'm saved! Thank you!

I really need to change the topic.

"So, err, whose present is that?"

"Eh, Kazari's."

"Ah, Kazari-chan. Kazari-chan, is it her birthday or something?"

"Yeah, it's a prize for winning a tournament – the *Monster Rancher* tournament championship prize."

"Why did you add that detail to the explanation..."

So that's why the rabbit seemed familiar...

But well, both Rikka and Kazari-chan really love games. Particularly retro games. They are both quite skilled at them too. It's not *Monster Hunter*, it's *Monster Rancher*.

Or perhaps I should say, the *Monster Rancher* tournament, even though it wasn't really a tournament.

How sad...

"But I would have gotten Kazari's life if I won the tournament... How disappointing."

"Why did Kazari-chan wager her life!?"

"Don't worry! It was an equivalent exchange!"

"That's really cool, but isn't Kazari-chan's life being treated too lightly!?"

"But Kazari's the one who proposed it... She was probably confident that she could beat me."

"Even if it was like that, it still seems..."

"Still, I'm glad I made this. I'll be happy if Kazari is pleased with this."

True to her word, Rikka looked really happy when she stared at the doll.

The rest of our walk to school was just like that, with Rikka and I having our usual fun conversations, until we finally, when we just arrived at school – at that exact moment.

A voice from behind suddenly addressed us.

Well, to be precise, it was more of a shout.

“Please wait a minute!”

Surprised by the sudden shout, Rikka and I turned towards the source of the voice at the same time.

There was a girl standing imposingly, wearing a very refreshing smile. And, again with a loud voice –

“Hahaha, you’ve finally been caught!”

“.....”

Er, who...?

I feel like I’ve seen her somewhere before, but it might have been just my imagination.

Maybe I felt that way since part of her outfit consisted of our school’s uniform.

Since the colour of her uniform’s ribbon is different, she must have been an upperclassman.

Hmmm... Apart from the ribbon, various other parts of the uniform were also different... In terms of colour alone.

“...Uhhh...?”

I was stumped by a variety of different reasons. Not only did it happened so suddenly, her uniform was so different as well, and to top it all off being told to “wait a minute” by a stranger left me completely speechless.

It was different for Rikka, however.

“You’ve come...!”

“Haha, that’s right! Takanashi Rikka-chan!”

Wait, what?

Rikka’s so unusually shy of strangers that she won’t respond to anyone she hasn’t met before; is this one of her acquaintances?

Her social circle seems to have expanded ever since she started playing with Kazari-chan.

“!? ... Why do you hinder us! ...By the way, Yuuta, the word for ‘hinder’ is really cool!”

“Don’t just suddenly talk to me after putting on airs!”

It’s quite hard to handle when you suddenly turn towards me with sparkling eyes.

But, then again... it certainly is a cool word!

“Ahaha! Either way, as we expected you’re as talented as the rumours say. Yes, very good. It seems that you possess a very strong power.”

“Huh!? How do you know about my powers!”

“We can tell if a person has special powers by looking at them.”

“Wow, amazing!”

“Right, isn’t it amazing?” the girl in front of me says while nodding her head in satisfaction.

Shifting my gaze over to Rikka – just like I thought, since she had been told that she had ‘special powers’, she looked satisfied.

Hmm.

I’m getting the sense that I’m the only one being left out.

However, I wasn’t able to join in with them in their conversation and could only watch as they continued their back and forth.

“How’s that? Don’t you want to become our subordinate?”

“Never! Yuuta and I are already contracted!”

“Damn... rejected! And so quickly too!”

“Of course! The Devilish Truth Stare is the strongest!”

“So, as expected... Looks like it can’t be helped. There’s only that method left...”

...Those lines feel like they belong to some battle manga.

Or maybe it’s just me.

Since I was lonely by myself, I was playing the straight man in my mind. While I was thinking that, the girl suddenly turned towards me and asked:

“You, the normal-kun over there, are you her boyfriend?”

She was glaring at me so intensely that I could almost hear the glare.

Her glare was so intense – it even looked like that there was an aura flowing out of her. It was so overbearing that it made me groan “ugh” as I was forced to take a step back.

But well, the question of whether I’m her boyfriend had to be answered properly.

“I’m her boyfriend,” I declared.

After hearing my words, the girl’s expression turned serious and –

“Please hand over your lover!”

Said those words while kneeling on the ground.

“.....Huh?”

No, that, this is...

Sadly, a situation like this occurred.

It seems like I’ve encountered the greatest crisis of my life.

Since entering high school I've already encountered several life crises, but this one is by far the greatest crisis I've ever faced.

I had completely forgot that this exchange was being held right in front of the school gates. By the time I noticed, I could feel cold stares directed at me from my surroundings. On top of that, more and more bystanders were beginning to gather.

It felt like with each passing moment, the situation was getting worse and worse.

If I were to briefly explain the current situation, it would be that a high-school girl suddenly knelt before me in front of the school gates, right before my girlfriend – and under these simple circumstances, my mind went completely blank.

Although the reason behind it was unclear, it was a simple situation like that.

But, from a bystander's point of view – a high school girl is being made to prostrate herself by a scumbag in front of the school gates (and in front of his girlfriend, too). What are they going to conclude!

Also, that scumbag is me.

Even though I didn't know how things ended up this way, I do know that if this continued, my school life would be over.

No matter what, I have to destroy the current situation immediately!

Making up my mind, I called out to the girl (temporarily Prostrate-senpai) kneeling in front of me.

"U-umm... for now could you please lift up your head...? While you're at it, could you also please stop kneeling..."

I finally managed to say something, but it seemed like Prostrate-senpai missed my point, since she suddenly raised her head and said:

"No can do! Not until you hand over your lover!"

After emphasising her request, she deeply lowered her head once again.

She even forcefully planted her forehead on the ground.

It was like she was trying to get permission to get married from an obstinate father-in-law, displaying the proper etiquette despite the fact that she could fail, but...

“Th-this place is kind of... umm, err, I’ll definitely listen carefully to what you have to say in a more suitable place.”

“There’s no need to change: it’s fine here! Besides, isn’t it too normal to talk about this in a place like a café!?”

“No, no, no! Prostrating in a place like this just makes other people think you’re really strange!”

That line of thought applied to me as well!

“How wonderful!”

“Why are you pleased!?”

...This was beyond my expectations.

At any rate, I wanted to leave this place as soon as possible.

Compared to before, it seems that there were more strong gazes directed at me and an increased number of bystanders.

In addition, Rikka was also completely stunned.

...Guess it can’t be helped.

“Rikka, let’s escape!”

“Hm?”

I careful took Rikka’s – who was blinking in surprise – hand and ran at full speed to flee into the school.

The grip I had on Rikka’s hand as we fled was so light that you couldn’t feel the power behind it.

In the background, I could hear voices saying stuff like, “What’s this?”, “What’s happening”, and “Isn’t that person...”, but I wasn’t concerned by any of that.

After passing the school gates, we kept on running until we reached the back of the gym, where it was devoid of people.

“... Ha, ha whew... tired...”

Since I was part of the going home club, I had never needed to run with all my might before, and so I was completely out of breath. Rikka, on the other hand, seemed completely fine.

Damn... Being part of the going home club is really uncool...

How.

Just when I started having stupid thoughts.

Next to me, who was catching his breath – Prostrate-senpai only needed one deep “whew” to catch her breath.

She caught up to us as if it were normal.

We didn’t escape at all!

After Prostrate-senpai took her deep breath, she fixed her hair that got dishevelled from running, then she turned towards me and looked straight at me.

“Geez, there was no need to come to a place that had no people.”

With that, she paused the conversation momentarily, and after a short moment a daring smile started to slip out.

“Whatever, it’s still fine. Now then, we ask of you once again – please hand over your lover!”

And then.

For the second time today.

As if she was showing her gratitude in a tea ceremony, her balance and posture was perfect as she prostrated before me.

It seems like the tragic series of events are far from over.

Chapter 2: Rainbow Maiden

Back then, I didn't recognise who she was since the situation was so abrupt, but now I finally remembered.

I knew who the girl before my eyes, Prostrate-senpai, was.

Although I said that I knew her, as it was one sided, it was probably more accurate to say that "I knew of her".

She's so famous that almost nobody in the school didn't know who she was.

There isn't anybody who doesn't know who she was – actually, it might be more accurate to say that there's no one who wouldn't turn their head in her presence.

Her full name is Amaniji Hideri.

An upperclassman who's a year above us.

A distinct existence.

There's a reason why Prostrate-senpai – I mean, Amaniji Hideri-senpai – was so famous.

Her nickname – the rainbow-haired maiden.

While her hairstyle does visibly change every day, that's not the reason why she's called the rainbow-haired maiden: rather, it's because her hair is literally dyed seven different colours.

However, even though there were the seven basic colours, her hair wasn't colour-coded like a rainbow. The tips of her bangs were pale yellow. Moving up the bangs, the pale yellow gradually shifted into a light orange, and then a soft red. In turn the soft red slowly turned into pink and violet. The long ends of her hair were beautiful shades of light blue and green.

As a result, it feels like her hair is radiating a sense of prominence.

Her uniform was, of course, adorned with rainbow-coloured accessories.

Wearing a rainbow slinky (the thing that you drop down stairs to play with) on her arm, I'm sure that anyone who saw her would think that she's a gaudy person.

In addition, her skirt, similar to Rikka's, looked like it had been remodelled. It too, by the way, also looked gaudy.

Seriously, the design and the colours were way too different.

Since her hair and uniform were so striking it was hard to notice, but her face was also well-balanced.

Her skin looked much lighter than it was because of her bright hair.

Furthermore, her large eyes were oddly beautiful.

Her glistening eyes seems to have the effect of drawing people's attention in a way that was different from how Rikka's Devilish Truth Stare charms people.

It was the first time I've looked at her closely, but her face, in my opinion, was first-class.

On top of that, while she wasn't that tall, her chest was still large enough to arouse the lust of a high school boy.

In spite of her slim figure, her looks were still top-tier.

But due to her flashiness and prominence, no one talked to her – there seems to be no rumours about anyone who got charmed by her.

I wasn't clear about the details about this though; this information is from my close friend, Isshiki Makoto.

While it's a bit off-topic, there's also a rumour that she never gets called on to answer questions in class. Apparently, all she does in class is stare at the teacher – she doesn't even take any notes. Despite that, she still hasn't been called upon to answer any questions.

Well, when it's full of eccentric stories like that, it feels like the rumours have begun take a life of its own. There were even rumours (according to Isshiki) about her not being human. As a result, Amaniji-senpai became quite a celebrity within the school.

So why is such a famous person kneeling before me?

Naturally, I didn't have a relationship with Amaniji-senpai.

I only knew who she was thanks to the rumours and the information from Isshiki. I'm sure that Amaniji-senpai didn't even know what my name was.

Since that's the case, she must be one of Rikka's acquaintances...

I'm very sorry since you're in the middle of kneeling, but I really need to talk to Rikka about this. Whispering, I asked:

"Hey, Rikka. She's your acquaintance, right? Could you deal with her?"

"Eh...? But I don't know who this person is..."

"You're not acquainted!?"

You were having a proper conversation with her in public, so I assumed that you two were acquainted, but it looks like I was wrong.

Then again, the conversation did feel like it was dialogue from a play.

“...Then, why did you say, “did you come”?”

“The mood.”

“The mood!?”

Weren’t you in high spirits, Rikka-san!

This morning was full of tension (I might have caused half of it), so I guess there probably was that kind of mood there.

Regardless, it seems like Rikka’s changing. While it’s common for her to act like that in response to the mood, she usually wouldn’t be able to have a conversation like that with a stranger.

Of course, this change was good.

But, if she’s not Rikka’s acquaintance, then the question of “What the heck does she want from us?” remains.

And, since it seemed like she’d continue to prostrate before me unless I did something, I gently called out to her.

“Umm, I’ll listen to what you have to say, so for the time being could you please stand normally for me.”

“Oh. Well, fine. Looks like it can’t be helped... It’s hard to talk while prostrating!”

Hopping up as she said that, she nimbly rose.

However, she was completely indifferent to request; she stood in an eccentric way.

Her left arm pointed to the sky, while her right arm pointed to the ground – to be honest, it looked like the Universal Demon Stance¹.

I couldn’t help but stare at it closely.

“...Err, did you understand my request at all!? Can you not stand normally!?”

“Nope, not at all. Even if you ask it of us, it’s not possible for us to do things normally. Sorry.”

“...”

Is that so...

Since I didn’t have any experience talking to someone in such a stance (I do find people like that unpleasant, however), I’m sure I had a puzzled look on my face. As she turned towards me, I got the feeling that Amaniji-senpai was about to burst into laughter looking at my face.

¹ A stance by Vearn, the main villain from “Dragon Quest: The Adventure of Dai”.

Just like the rumours said, it seems that she has a strange personality.

“Oh, right – we haven’t introduced ourselves, have we? We’ve an upperclassman that’s a year level above you, Amaniji Hideri. We’ve pleased to make your acquaintance. From now on, please treat us well!”

“Ha... I sort of already knew who you are, but... Uhh, I’m Togashi Yuuta, and I’ll be in your care too.”

Since she gave me her self-introduction, it was only fair that I did the same.

After I introduced myself, Rikka –

“I’m Takanashi Rikka.”

– responded normally.

Oh? It’s rare for Rikka to introduce herself normally. It might be since she’s talking to an upperclassman.

“But my true name is ‘Wielder of the Strongest Devilish Truth Stare, Yuuta’s Contracted Jet Black Fallen Angel – Takanashi Rikka’. Pleased to meet you.”

However, shortly afterwards, she added that part of her usual self-introduction as well, and then gave a brief bow.

Damn it, return to me the feeling that it was unusual!

“Okay, Wielder of the Strongest Devilish Truth Stare, Yuuta’s Contracted Jet Black Fallen Angel – Takanashi Rikka-chan.”

“You’re going to call her that every time!?”

That retort was mine.

Still, it made me think.

My plain full name is quite easy for people to get wrong.

“Hmm, we thought that it’d be alright since your full name’s super cool, but we’re certain that it’s too normal to call you by your full name. Well then... how about we abbreviate it to Devilish Truth Rikka-chan, or DevTru Rikka-chan?”

“...Guess it can’t be helped; I don’t mind.”

...It can’t be helped, huh. You don’t mind, huh.

Perhaps it was a little cool though. Rikka looked really satisfied.

“Great! That’s decided then! Oh, about our nickname, feel free to call us Rainbow Hideri-san!”

“...Urk... Disagreeable...”

“Eh, disagreeable...? Uh...? Ah, what about Arc-san...?”

“It’s pointlessly cool!?”

The retort came from me again.

Opps, it’s my usual habit again... I’m sorry for interrupting in the middle of the conversation.

Hmm, looks like I can’t escape from the sad fate of the straight man.

“Heh heh, that’s right, that’s right. Our name could be translated as Arc-en-Ciel Hideri. To not have seen a pattern as obvious as that until now, there must have been something wrong with our eyes! It’s a reliable nickname. Pleased to meet you, DevTru Rikka-chan!”

After saying that, Amaniji-senpai finally stood normally, and then bowed her head.

Although her personality’s a bit strange, it seems like introductions are still done properly.

Well then, now that our self-introductions are more or less done, it’s time to talk about main subject.

“Um, Amaniji-senpai –”

“Hey-hey-hey-hey! Amaniji-senpai is not normal! Normal’s no good!”

Amaniji-senpai suddenly interrupted me.

Only her last phrase, “Normal’s no good!”, was said in a strong tone – at least, it felt like it was.

Somehow, her facial expression was openly giving off a feeling of discouragement. However, since her facial expression had changed only slightly, the feeling of discouragement felt a bit out of place.

Speaking about the mood, it seemed to resemble the mood that occurred a short while ago, where being “normal” wasn’t acceptable.

But since I wasn’t able to change the mood, I went along with it.

“We-well, how about something like Hideri-senpai-san?”

“Hmm... you’re kind of normal. But since the name’s a bit unique, we’ll give you 40 points for it. It’s fine, but you should call us something that gives the impression of ‘the seven lights of the blazing sun’.”

“While such a nickname suits you, please think about how I’d feel calling someone with a nickname like that...!”

“...Seven Twinkle Sun, how cool.”

Rikka was so enamoured by the name to the extent that she forgot about Amaniji-senpai’s presence.

Still, she did it in a way that escaped Amaniji-senpai's notice – it looks like Rikka's guard was still up.

"Do you not like it? Well, how about something like 'lapnes-ijinama'?"

"You respond to being called nonsense like that!?"

"Jeez. You're pretty selfish. We understand, we understand. Since you're normal, it's fine if you call us Amaniji-senpai – it seems that you really are as normal as you appear."

"Done!"

I'm being treated too crudely.

"Now, ordinary people don't interest us at all. Hah, guess it can't be helped. This upperclassman will make an exception and call you 'Normal-chan'. Oh, calling you 'Normal-chan' for the first time feels somewhat special. What do you think, DevTru Rikka-chan?"

"...It's acceptable."

"....."

Rikka's choice of words felt a bit thorny...

Perhaps she's having mixed feelings because of her position in this conversation.

If that's the case, I'm happy.

"Permission also obtained from DevTru Rikka-chan! Then Normal-chan it is! Oh, as for our nickname, while it's not our first preference, we've fine with you addressing us as Amaniji-senpai."

And, in the end.

Our nicknames for each other was decided against my wishes by Amaniji-senpai, who was visibly displeased with being named that.

Her facial expression seemed to say, "it's not a problem if you want to address me with a strange nickname".

Well then.

Let's return to the main subject. If we don't return to the main subject soon, the school's opening ceremony will start before the conversation's over.

"So, Amaniji-senpai. Are you now happy to talk about what you wanted from us?"

"Err, we'd like to just talk with DevTru Rikka-chan..."

Since it felt like she was pleading with me, I'll let Amaniji-senpai meet her beloved Rikka.

...She was to my immediate left just moments ago, but when I took a step back, before I knew it Rikka was hidden right behind me again.

Looks like this conversation is going nowhere.

Guess I'll need to step in to facilitate the conversation.

"Hmm? Is DevTru Rikka-chan bashful?"

"...Something like that."

"Hmm, guess we'll also tell Normal-chan then. In that case, let us go over today's request once again. Normal-chan's lover – that is, Takanashi Rikka-chan – please hand her over to us," said Amaniji-senpai for literally the third time – this time with a polite bow.

I couldn't tell from just from her posture and her tone of voice, but it didn't feel like a joke – it felt like a sincere, heartfelt desire.

However, I couldn't understand the true meaning of her words.

I was completely ignorant as to what her request was.

"Uh... what exactly does that mean? If you don't elaborate, I'm unable to comprehend what your request is..."

"Eh? But it's exactly like we said. We like her. Therefore, we want you to hand her over to us."

"What?"

"There's no hidden meaning, but from your expression it seems that you're rather confused. Shouldn't this be pleasant? Hmm, but we guess that we are a bit abnormal."

"Pleasant!? Wait, but I didn't want you to announce that you were abnormal!?"

Ah, my retort gauge seems to be decreasing considerably...

Hmm, I wonder if I've ever retorted as much to a stranger as I have today... No, I don't think I have.

I'm confident that my weariness was showing on my face.

"No way – you really are normal, aren't you? Isn't it normally better to be abnormal? We mean, we like girls, so it's a bit different, but isn't everything we said just now true –"

'It's true...!?' is what I thought, but since my retort gauge was too low, I couldn't vocalise my thoughts.

My retort gauge was still recharging.

"– and so, we've come to ask of you: just a little while, could you please lend us DevTru Rikka-chan's abilities?"

"For a little while? Abilities?"

I tilted my head.

Sigh. What her intentions were became even more confusing.

Since she asked me to give her Rikka, I thought it might have been a declaration of war for Rikka's heart, but it seems like that's not the case.

"...Phrasing it like that, what exactly is it that you want Rikka to do?" I asked frankly.

After I asked that, Amaniji-senpai stared at me motionlessly.

After she carefully stared at me for around five seconds, she closed her eyes and vigorously nodded.

Her exaggerated movements gave away that she was regretful about it from the bottom of her heart.

"Yes, about that. We actually wanted to talk to DevTru Rikka-chan about this a lot earlier, but DevTru Rikka-chan's ability was too high for us to approach her."

"Err... what does that mean?"

"To tell you the truth, during the summer holidays we had tried to approach her several times about our request. However, every time we got close to her, she would say stuff to herself like "Mm... someone from the Organisation!?", causing us to conceal ourself.

"Ah..."

I can definitely see that happening.

That's just like Rikka.

"Even if we ambushed her, it was no good. We also didn't know where she lived, so we couldn't contact her directly either... Well, it was sort of like playing detective, so it was still pretty fun! Today, however, DevTru Rikka-chan seemed kind of careless. Heh heh, maybe being with your boyfriend made you drop your guard?" Amaniji-senpai answered with a smile.

I see, what she said makes a lot of sense.

If I remember correctly, Rikka's perception was so sharp that it did seem like a sixth sense. I personally call it 'Rikka Sense'².

Oh.

But I guess Rikka would say that it was one of the Devilish Truth Stare's abilities.

As a result of her sharp perception, she may have sensed some danger (Amaniji-senpai did give off a dangerous aura), so Rikka may have been trying to avoid Amaniji-senpai.

Still, I don't know why Amaniji-senpai wanted to meet up with Rikka.

² Pun the reading of sixth sense (第六感). Here, sixth sense, which is read as dairokykan (だいろくかん) is read here by Yuuta as dairikkan (だいらっかん), making it a pun on Rikka's name (六花) since 六 can be read as both roku and ri.

"I now understand why you've come here to meet up with Rikka, but what exactly is it that you wanted her do for you?"

"We were wondering if you would let her become our bride? Hm?"

"...No way."

My disgust was probably showing in my eyes as I replied.

Meanwhile, you could see Amaniji-senpai bursting into laughter.

Incidentally, Rikka, who was behind me, whispered "absolutely no way." It was super-cute.

"Like we said, Normal-chan really is too normal. We mean, you were so normal that we couldn't help but laugh!"

"No, anyone who suddenly hears stuff like that would have reacted in the same way!"

"If that's what Normal-chan's thinks, does that mean you're the straight man among your friends? Even if it's normal to be the straight man, isn't it pointless?"

"Uggh...!"

No way, I'm out of retorts!

That damaged me quite a bit...!

"Oh my. Saying strange things seems to wear down on my opponent health, meaning that he's unable to speak normally for a long time. You should practice giving retorts more."

"You should seriously be relieved that I seem unwell!"

Looks like my retort gauge has been recovering.

Although it was an ordinary retort, at least the retorts were coming!

But, ha... What happened just now got me worried.

Nevertheless, I can't get disheartened. If I can't end this conversation soon, the opening ceremony will start.

"...So, what exactly is your request?"

Due to our previous back and forth, I let out a small sigh as I asked her that question again.

Upon hearing my question, Amaniji-senpai's expression tightened from an happy expression into a serious one.

It seemed that this time, she will actually tell us what she really wanted.

"Well, what we said previously was the truth, but there's a slight detail we didn't tell you. We've part of the 'Eccentric Drama Club', and there's a cultural festival soon, right?"

“Uhh, it’s in a week, right?”

“Yeah, and to tell you the truth, we don’t have enough actors. And so, I we were eyeing DevTru Rikka-chan to join us. We were hoping that she could lend us her power.”

As Amaniji-senpai finally told us about her request, she let out a short but deep sigh.

I now finally understand what Amaniji-senpai’s request was.

The cultural festival.

Right, the cultural festival’s happening soon.

Today’s the beginning of the second semester, so there’s only a week until the cultural festival.

Well, to be precise, including today there was only nine days left.

As a result of our class poll, it was decided that our class was doing a dance for the cultural festival.

As a matter of fact, I even went to school during the summer vacation to rehearse for it.

While it mainly centred around the Class King Nibutani Shinka and the dance club, all the girls in our class were taking part in the dance.

By the way, all the boys were part of the stage crew and were in charge of stuff like lighting, props and setting the stage. However, this arrangement was what all the boys wanted and carried all of our passionate hopes.

After all, we only want to see cute girls dance!

Naturally, we were still diligently rehearsing for the cultural festival.

Still, the club ‘Eccentric Drama Club’ that Amaniji-senpai belonged to was one I’ve never heard of before.

Well, my lack of awareness of the club may have been due to the fact that I was not very interested in joining any clubs.

Even so, I was still confused as to why their club activities – which, I’m sorry to say, is still a mystery to me – would require Rikka.

I wonder if it’s because Amaniji-senpai thought that Rikka had the talent to be an eccentric actress.

“Um, so why Rikka?”

“Hm? Oh, there were various reasons, but it probably boils down to the fact that we were personally interested in her!” Amaniji-senpai replied with a grin, sticking her chest out with pride.

Seeing that, I couldn’t help but groan in my heart.

After all, I had a reason to groan, right? Yeah, I definitely had reasons to groan.

Amaniji-senpai's appearance (including her uniform) belonged to a class of its own, and you could say the same about her personality as well.

Even so, these reasons weren't so important that it would cause me to groan.

While I was anguishing over this problem in my head, it seemed like Amaniji-senpai was continuing with her point.

"Furthermore, DevTru Rikka-chan's golden eye is soooo attractive. It was love at first sight! The instant we saw it, we wanted to marry her! And, she also looks extremely lovely wearing an eyepatch! There's also a role that's perfect for her. And that's why we want to performance a play together with her."

"..."

I'm certain of it now. Definitely, this girl definitely has a fetish for mismatched eye colours...!

But Rikka's mismatched eyes are due to a coloured contact.

I'm at a loss as to how to break the truth to her.

Well, it doesn't seem like it was going to be a huge issue, so let's just ignore it and ask about the other problem.

"But, isn't it the cultural festival in a week? Why would you only ask for help now? Although, even if you did ask for help earlier, I guess it'd still be quite tough..."

"Hmm... We are asking for a lot. Yeah, guess it's a natural question to have."

Upon saying that, Amaniji-senpai frowned for the first time. And then, with a gloomy tone, she continued:

"We didn't want to tell you this since we didn't want any pity, but... ha, looks like we don't have a choice. To tell you the truth – including us, our club only has two members. ...And, umm, since our club didn't get any new members this year, we were thinking about disbanding the club after this year's cultural festival."

Amaniji-senpai chose her words carefully as she slowly continued.

"To conclude – although we decided to stick with the club until the very end, the number of members was still a problem... We believe that was all just before summer vacation began. Then we discovered Takanashi Rikka-chan. We were running out of time, and we had to ask you about it, but... "

"... I see," I gently acknowledged.

That certainly was a bit of a depressing story.

“Since it’s going to be our last play, we were willing to do anything to make it happen – that’s why we asked you abruptly like that without caring for appearances. We’ve really sorry about that. So, DevTru Rikka-chan, how about it?”

“...?”

When I turned towards Rikka, I saw that she was looking up at me with watery eyes, unsure of how she should respond.

I mean, it’s not like I didn’t understand that feeling.

“...Well, Rikka’s busy with various stuff like our class performance...What else can I say...”

When there’s a long period of silence, it seems that Rikka finds it painful to talk, so for a short while I’ll talk on her behalf.

I mean, it was true that Rikka was in fact busy with the dance.

“Yeah, that’s true. We were well aware that if our request was impossible, we’d have to give up on it. Since it can’t be helped... Yeah, we’ll figure something out in the time we have left.”

“Um...”

Rikka opened her mouth.

“What if Yuuta took part...”

“MEEE!?” I yelled in falsetto in response to the sudden mysterious proposal.

That came out of nowhere! Even though I was the facilitator, in the context of this conversation I should have been an outsider!

“Ah, ack. No no Rikka. Amaniji-senpai is asking for your help, not mine...”

“Yeah... that’s right. We only need DevTru Rikka-chan’s help...Normal-chan’s normality... It’s a bit...”

Amaniji-senpai also let out her dissatisfaction with the idea.

While I was briefly happy about being called normal, as expected being called normal in a derogatory manner diminished that feeling. I mean, anyone would be unhappy being called normal in such a manner.

Oh, but since I’m just an ordinary person, I guess it was inevitable that I was called that...

As if to encourage me to lament in such sorrows, a gentle tone rang.

The gentle tone, Chime-san – it was so cruel, as it signalled the start of the opening ceremony.

“Oh, it’s that time already? Please excuse us! The opening ceremony, it’s starting! Well then, see ya.”

“Hu...huh?”

And, as we looked on blankly, Amaniji-senpai turned around and left. However, she didn’t head towards the entrance of the gymnasium – she went in the opposite direction.

Where’s she going?

Maybe she’s skipping the opening ceremony...

She did say that she detested being “normal”, so maybe that’s why she’s reluctant to go to the opening ceremony.

That sort of thinking – but since I sort of get it, I’m not going to comment about it.

“Phew.”

When Amaniji-senpai left, for some reason Rikka let out a sigh of relief.

It was Rikka’s first time meeting her, so I guess she must have been nervous.

“Hm? What’s wrong? Were you nervous?”

“Yuuta, didn’t you notice?”

“Notice?”

“Arc-san... she was a terrifying person. Her aura was overwhelming. ...I’m not sure if I can beat her.”

...Seriously? It was overwhelming to the extent that it made Rikka, who boasts herself to be the strongest, say those words?

Well, to be fair, it certainly did feel like she had a strange aura.

“But it’s fine. Since my Devilish Truth Stare is still developing, I still have a slight edge. I definitely won’t lose.”

“...You truly are the strongest.”

“Naturally. Its golden shine won’t lose to the colours of the rainbow.”

The colours of the rainbow, huh.

Amaniji-senpai – a distinct existence. Prominence personified.

While I have no idea about who it was that came up with these descriptions, they truly did hit the bull’s-eye.

Just like Rikka said, she really did feel like a terrifying person.

Her terrifyingness – its more than just her abnormality.

“By the way, Yuuta, what are we going to do about opening ceremony? I think it’s already begun.”

“Ah...”

Damn it, I completely forgot about that.

Even if we went now, we’d still be late.

However, if we didn’t go, it’d seem like the two of us were playing truant, so the two of us had no choice but to go and be prepared to get scolded...

However.

I still couldn’t think of an excuse as to why we were late, and even contemplated about skipping the opening ceremony – while I was anguishing over my indecisiveness, Rikka tapped me on my shoulder.

Her smiling face was the very image of overflowing self-confidence.

“The Devilish Truth Stare has the ability to rewind time, so we’re fine!”

Chapter 3: The Distinctively Strange and Unique Upperclassman

It wasn't fine.

Obviously.

After all –

“Ah, opps! Since I was preparing to battle against Arc-san's aura, my powers have been exhausted...! The newly acquired 'Deadline Present' cannot be used! It's a disaster!!”

– Rikka's new skill exhibition ended like that.

In the end, since two people coming late at the same time was worse than two people coming late one at a time, we decided to have each of us come in late at different times.

Since the person who came in late first wouldn't be scolded as harshly, Rikka went to the opening ceremony first, while I headed for our classroom to put away Rikka's luggage, the present, before coming in late second for the opening ceremony.

Naturally, our homeroom teacher, Tsukumo Nanase (nicknamed Nana-chan), was really angry with me.

My excuses were useless (I had answered honestly that a certain upperclassman had held us up), with Nana-chan, who truly seemed angry, saying: “Is Yuuta-kun part of the faction who thinks it's alright to skip the opening ceremony? Sensei can't even tell anymore, which makes her sad...”

It felt like a 'sob story'.

On the other hand, she didn't seem to get angry at all with Rikka.

It seemed that Rikka somehow managed to arrive to the opening ceremony on time.

Although I was the only one who got scolded, given that Rikka didn't end up getting scolded I won't complain about being sacrificed.

Afterwards.

After all that, Amaniji-senpai didn't come to find us again.

Since we didn't finish our conversation, we were prepared for her to come find us right away, but we haven't heard from her since. Because there was no guarantee that Amaniji-senpai would come find us again, we decided to head home.

That's why, during the school's half-holiday (it's a dead phrase), I escorted Rikka home first as per usual before going home myself, under the scorching sun.

On our way home, we talked a lot about the cultural festival issue, but since we didn't reach a conclusion, the matter was put on hold.

And then, at home.

After finishing my lunch at home alone, I moved to my room.

Since it was so hot, I turned on the air-conditioner and, because I had nothing better to do, rolled around on my bed while thinking back on what happened this morning.

.....

...That really was the greatest crisis of my life.

I'm the scumbag who made his upperclassman prostrate before him in front of the school gates... Although that's not what really happened.

Regardless, I hope there won't be any rumours about it tomorrow.

Ugh, I'm worried...

Speaking about worries, wasn't there also the cultural festival matter?

That also made me think back to when Amaniji-senpai asked us to perform in the play.

It was her absolute last chance – that's what she said.

I didn't know what kind of circumstances she was in, but I could tell that it was really troubling her. While she did prostrate herself before me many times over, it was still impossible to guess what her situation was from how she was appealing to me.

That's to be expected after all – those were my thoughts upon reminiscing about it.

If there was something that I could do to help her out, I would be happy to assist.

However, Rikka's role in our class dance complicated things a lot.

Since Rikka's one of our class' key dancers, I'm not sure if she had the time to practice for a play on top of the dance.

Then again, Rikka herself did say "I'm already able to perform the dance".

On top of that, she said that if I wasn't part of the play then she wouldn't be either.

That means... it's become my problem...?

This morning, that upperclassman had absolutely no interest in me at all. Rather, if anything, she was treating me a bit too coldly.

Even if I did offer to take part in the play, it seems likely she'd reject my help, saying something along the lines of 'We don't want Normal-chan'.

Besides, even before that, I'm doubtful that I'm even able to take part in something like a play.

.....

...That's not true.

While it may seem a bit arrogant of me to say this, but I may have the ability to act.

To tell the truth, I used to suffer from chuunibyou.

When I was ill, everything was play-like, and I created and played the role of a me who wasn't me, the 'Dark Flame Master'.

I shouted embarrassing lines without feeling any shame at all.

This lack of shame wasn't just limited to speech – I even pretended to pull off impossible actions.

It seems that the past had made me strong.

But, well, it still is an embarrassing past though.

"Oh, looks like it really was Onii-chan who came home! You're early today~! Welcome home, and I'm home!"

"Hm? Oh, welcome home. I'm home early since today was the opening ceremony."

While I was slowly pondered over what happened this morning, it seemed that before I knew it, Yumeha, the Togashi family's second daughter and my little sister, had returned home from the nursery.

I got off the bed and checked the clock.

It seems like I had idled on my bed for an hour... Wow.

Shifting my attention to Yumeha, it seemed that she came to my room as soon as she got home, as she still had not finished changing her clothes yet.

She was wearing her gym uniform, which looked easy to move in.

Why was coming to my room the first thing you did?

"Hey! Onii-chan, listen, listen! Just then I saw an amazing person! Super amazing! Their hair was so amazing that it seemed like they had an ability!"

"...An ability?"

Looks like Yumeha's steadily being influenced by Rikka...

Then again, it might have been my influence.

Also, hair...?

"I'm sure that she knows Rikka! She could probably even transform like Rikka! A PrettyCure transformation!"

"Wait, since when could Rikka transform like PrettyCure?"

"She can't? What about transforming like Ojamajo?"

"How do you know about Ojamajo...?"

I thought that people of Yumeha's age didn't know what Ojamajo Doremi was.

Maybe there was a rerun.

“Well, whatever! That’s all! Now then, Yumeha’s going out to play by herself for a bit!”

“Oh, okay. Please be careful.”

“Kay!”

And with a smile on her face, Yumeha bounced out of my room.

Well.

Full of energy like always.

I really wonder who she takes after since she grew up to be such a sweet child. Both mum and dad were natural airheads.

In any case – an amazing person, huh.

Weird, I wonder why I have this really bad premonition. It feels like this premonition was saying “Yumeha might get hurt”.

I didn’t have something like an ability to detect bad premonitions, but I should go check on her just in case.

I’ll go ask Yumeha where she’s planning to go play as soon as I get up.

Knock, knock, knock, knock.

There was a muffled sound coming from my room’s glass door.

And if you turned around.

There was an amazing person. Or you could say, there was a dangerous person.

“No no no no no no”

An amazing and dangerous person – Amaniji-senpai was there.

Looking at her, she was still in uniform. It had been quite some time since the opening ceremony ended, but it appeared that instead of going home, Amaniji-senpai went straight to my house?

More importantly, why is she here... or rather, or rather!

What are you doing on someone else’s veranda!

By the way, the Togashi residence is a normal two-storey house. And my room is on the second floor.

It’s amazing, it’s dangerous.

Coming back to her being on my veranda, it’s too unbelievable! How did you get up onto the veranda of the second floor!

She’s not normal!

When Amaniji-senpai saw me, she tightened her innocent expression into a daring smile similar to the one she wore this morning.

She was looking directly at me.

Her gaze seemed to be telling me to let her in.

No, see...

Still, I couldn't just abandon her, so I had no choice but to open the glass door.

It was still hot outside, so a mild summer breeze blew into my room.

At the same time, Amaniji-senpai took off her shoes and she entered my room.

Then, looking up at me delightfully, with a sweet smile:

"Pardon our intrusion! Hehehe, it's strange to be meeting in a place like this!"

...It's strange in every sense of the word!

I was on the verge of voicing my retort like I usually would, but I ended up stopping myself.

Retorting this upperclassman, evident by what happened this morning, only derails the conversation. It was not a hobby of mine to prevent myself from talking.

Still, although Amaniji-senpai did say that she was willing to do anything for her mysterious play, I thought she didn't want "normal".

...But she's now trespassed into my room.

"Umm, why are you here?"

"Eh, because entering through the front door's normal."

"That wasn't what I was asking about!"

In the end, I still retorted.

A salute to my straight man spirit! No, what did I just do!

I mean, I can't believe that I'm retorting even in my own house!

"Ah. Our house is on the third floor, but since we've been reported to the police many times now, we have had to restrain ourselves. Sorry, and we don't mind if you also speak ill of how miserable it is to yield to the power of the state!"

"Please don't answer as if you've seen through me! ...So, how did you make it up here...?"

"With effort? There were quite a few footholds, so we managed."

"....."

I went to the veranda to check her claim.

Hmm.

Certainly, if she used her feet to hang onto the piping, it's possible.

But it wasn't a method that you would normally think of.

How do I put it – it made me worried for the security side of things.

A normal girl like this could – wait, a girl who climbs up the piping of a house wouldn't be normal.

Hmm?

Right, you wouldn't normally be climbing up the piping...

Especially in broad daylight. This abnormal person is making me lose my sense of normality.

Her trespassing was so abnormal that it became too bothersome to tell her off about it. I was troubled for a moment about how I should report this to the power of the state – err, I mean, the police –, but I'll just let this incident go.

I guess you could say that an incident like this was so shocking to the point that it was impossible to describe.

However, this person... Why did it feel like she had been looking at me with a smile this entire time... I'm scared...

"More importantly, how did you know where my house was?"

"We found it on Facebook!"

"I haven't posted my address on there; you're really scaring me!"

I'll never place my personal information on the net that easily!

"Ahaha, looks like you couldn't tell that it was a joke!"

"No... I knew that you were joking..."

"Besides, we dislike using stuff like Facebook since everyone uses it. We mean, we still look for penpals in the reader's corner of magazines."

"How are people like you still around!"

"Well, spoiler – if you try your hardest to find out such things at school you'll eventually find it. Even without using something like Facebook, it's easy to get personal information!"

"And that's extremely scary... But if that's the case, wouldn't have it been better if you checked where Rikka's house was...?"

"Of course, that was the first thing we searched for. However, her current address seems to be different from the address we found at school."

Amaniji-senpai looked a bit puzzled as she replied.

I too was also puzzled by that information.

Taking into consideration Rikka's current situation, it didn't make any sense... Well, there's no point thinking about it deeply for now.

Right now, I need to figure out how to deal with this upperclassman.

"So, what are you doing at my house again...?"

"Because it seemed interesting."

It seemed interesting...

"Is that so... Umm, since my room's empty and is more or less clean, please feel free to take a seat."

Accepting that it couldn't be helped, I returned to my room from my veranda, closing the glass door after suggesting to Amaniji-senpai to take a seat.

However, Amaniji-senpai didn't sit down; she looked around my room as if she was evaluating it, and, after a small nod, she looked at me with what seemed to be a disappointed expression.

"Hmm, unfortunately your room looks normal?"

"Then what was the kind of room senpai was expecting...?"

"Let's see, a boy's room would be more; we imagined that it'd be a room that was reflective of what you were influenced by. It would be decorated with stuff like golden dragons and dubious posters. Still, this room's so unusually clean that it's to the point where it's sort of suspicious."

It's a room that houses an abnormal secret, she softly added.

...She had a keen eye.

This room does house an abnormal secret.

There shouldn't be anyone else apart from Rikka who would come to my room, but it seemed that it was necessary to rearrange my room so that people wouldn't get suspicious.

I wasn't not sure if Amaniji-senpai has a liking for narrow spaces or not, but during the time when her expectations were being pleasantly shocked, she went and sat in the corner of my room.

I mean, I did tell her to take a seat, so it wasn't a problem or anything.

"By the way, Amaniji-senpai, because of you I was late today..."

"Ah, sorry! If they talk to you about that matter again then you can blame us for it. Say that there was a strange incident with a strange upperclassman."

“Eh... you’re actually aware of it?”

I’m speechless. This upperclassman’s too strange.

“Well, whatever, don’t worry about it – senpai, where did you end up going? Also, on that note, isn’t it bad to be doing stuff like playing truant?”

“Rude. We weren’t playing truant. We simply entered from the back and listened to the ceremony from behind the stage. Well, we also did end up kind of late as well.”

“.....”

She was serious.

It was definitely not a normal thing to do... Well, if I care too much about what this upperclassman does, it’ll only tire me out...

“Err... about why you’re here – it’s about this morning’s request, right?”

“‘Wrong!’ is what we want to say, but you’re right. As per usual, please forgive us. We’re the worst, aren’t we.... Truly, we’ve really sorry.”

Isn’t she apologising too much?

Seriously, this person, what kind of person was she...

“We-well, let’s not fuss over strange things like that as well... For some reason this conversation feels like it’s going to take a while, so I’ll go bring in some tea...”

“Oh? A neglect play³! Doing something like abandoning your partner in the room as if it were natural, that’s definitely not something a normal person can do! Not bad! Our opinion of you is a little better! Please feel free to do a neglect play!”

“But that wasn’t my intention at all!? You’re seriously sticking with the impression that this is a strange place; looks like I can’t leave someone like you in the corner...”

“That’s right, so let us sit in the centre!”

...It was a leading question!?”

It felt like that magnificent exchange just now was completely calculated.

Perhaps sitting in that corner and repeatedly putting words in my mouth was all for sake of setting me up to say the words “I can’t leave you in the corner”...

I couldn’t guess what the point of it was, or more precisely, what her intentions were, but was that mentalism just now?

Wow, I’m impressed.

But it was still exhausting.

³ BDSM, where you neglect your partner.

“Well then... umm, I’ll be doing the neglect play, so please wait a bit for me.”

“Please do not worry. We’ll be diligently waiting in the centre!”

“Haa... thanks for your patience,” I said as I left the room.

Hmm, I’m pretty sure that she wasn’t going to go vandalise my room, so it should be fine to head out to the living room for some tea.

I went to the kitchen and took two cups out of the cupboard.

I also took out some rice crackers from the cupboard and barley tea from the fridge, before heading straight back to my room.

The instant when I got back in my room –

“...What the heck is it that you came here to dooooo!?”

– I raised my voice.

Just like she said, Amaniji-senpai was quietly waiting for me in the centre of my room in a seiza.

She was diligently waiting for me, but her clothes – she somehow managed to change from her uniform.

It looked like she was wearing a Gachapin⁴ onesie.

“Heh heh heh, we’ve come to win you over, as a monster!!!”

“.....”

I’m just going to completely ignore Amaniji-senpai’s extremely satisfied smile.

Sitting face-to-face, I gently placed the tea and rice crackers that I had prepared right in front of her.

“Umm... it’s tea. Here you go.”

“Oof, so the two of us going to keep continuing the neglect play. You’re expecting us to play along now, right?”

Amaniji-senpai’s cheeks were a little red, and her hands were in front of her chest squirming.

It made me happy since it felt like a small victory.

“Even though we only changed our clothes in a hurry for this... Maybe it would be better to take this off. Hmm...”

“Wa-wait a minute... Underneath, your uniform’s underneath, right?”

⁴ The mascot of a popular children’s program *Hirake! Ponkiki*.

“Naturally! It’s underwear!”

“Underwear!? Please don’t strip! That’s right, that appearance, it’s extremely dangerous and is unbelievably out of place here!”

“Ah, really? Great. Yeah, that’s right: it is sort of normal to be naked in your own home!”

I had actually said that it wasn’t normal, but if I actually clarified that then it would become problematic, so I killed those words right before they left my mouth.

That was really dangerous.

“Ah, right. We thought that it wouldn’t be good if Normal-chan came back when we were still changing my clothes, so we borrowed your closet for a bit. It’s an ex post facto report, sorry.”

“Not good huh... Well, it is true that you wouldn’t want to be seen while you are in the middle of changing your clothes. I don’t really mind, so it’s fine.”

“You’re wrong: we’ve not opposed to you watching over the scene of us changing clothes. It’s just that, it’s sort of normal, Right? It’s a manga trope after all.”

“This world doesn’t have such a trope!”

What kind of trope is that.

I’ve never experienced it before.

“Hahaha, but more importantly! We’ve gotten a bit more interested in Normal-chan.”

“Hu-huh?”

“Weeell, that set of complete female clothing you own is on a whole another level! It’s not normal at all! Even we were surprised!”

“Gaaaaaaaaaah!”

Th-that, that was...

Although Rikka went through great lengths to get me to accept those magical girl transformation goods, since I didn’t know what my family would say if they found out, I was keeping it sealed in my closet.

This is... even more damaging than the time Rikka found my dark notebook.

It’s a new genre – to be exposed as a crossdresser!

Stuff like finding the dark notebook has already become normal!

Ugh...

“Ahaha, don’t make such a miserable face. Don’t worry, we won’t tell anyone as long as you change into those clothes right now!”

“Is that unconditional!?”

I immediately fell into that sweet trap.

That’s not right, actually – this is a strategy of mine where I quickly take countermeasures before being threatened.

It’s definitely going to be a big problem if rumours of me being a crossdresser were to spread.

That’s what I’m convincing myself...!

“Yeah yeah, trust me! It’s because we want to have a special relationship with you where the two of us share a secret like that!”

“Please don’t phrase it like that! Moreover, I don’t have a habit of cross-dressing, alright...?”

While giving an explanation like that, I tottered towards the front of my closet to unleash my sealed treasure – err, I mean, the magical girl transformation goods.

Because it was a precious present from Rikka, I needed to be delicate and careful with it.

“This was called, ah, having ‘a special fetish’, Normal-chan! A special fetish – we like the sound of that!”

“Isn’t that something that a pervert would say!?”

“What? Do you think that we’re a pervert?”

“Don’t try to win the conversation!”

This person, does she think self-contempt is fun!?

That’s definitely some kind of special fetish!

“Ah, it seems that Normal-chan is normal, and doesn’t have a special fetish like being watched as he changes? Sorry sorry, we didn’t notice. We’ve turned around so go change!”

“Eh? You’re not going to leave the room!?”

“We love hearing the rustling sound when someone’s changing their clothes.”

“Your special fetisshh!”

Seemingly ignoring my words, Amaniji-senpai was in the centre of my room with her back facing towards me.

Her leaving – looks like that’s not going to happen.

However, changing clothes right behind a girl’s back... Gah.

Still, this situation, it's strange. It wasn't like the words of Amaniji-senpai weren't strange, but isn't the troupe normally the other way around? Well, it's not like the reverse was normal either.

But, it seems, today isn't going to be "normal" at all.

And, while cursing that fact in my heart, I threw away my reluctance and got changed quickly.

Into the magical girl outfit that I had gotten used to by now.

"...Um, it's okay to turn around now."

"Yeah, the sound of your clothes rustling was great!"

Turning around, Amaniji-senpai looked in my direction. A boy cosplaying as a magical girl was face to face with a girl in a monster onesie – it was an extremely surreal sight.

"Ahaha! It's great, it's great! Abnormality suits the two of us!"

"You're not going to say that normal suits me!?"

"Well, see, we only meant it as a joke, but you really went and did it! Just admit it – Normal-chan isn't normal! Our impression of you is rapidly improving!"

"It was a joke!?"

Furthermore, her impression of me was rapidly improving.

I'm not very happy about that...

"Hmm. We've the ones at fault here since we found and opened it without permission. Still, us acting freely made things proceed in an interesting direction, so we're completely satisfied! Come now, let's talk about this morning's tale, Yuu-chan!"

"You're getting too overfamiliar!"

"Hehe, Yuu-chan. How nice, calling you Yuu-chan feels even more special than calling you Normal-chan. Since that's the case, we'll call you Yuu-chan from now on!"

"....."

Looks like my nickname's ranked up.

Together with my current appearance, and with a name like that, I didn't know if I had sublimated to this situation and was feeling happy or if this situation was making me sad.

I mean, to be honest, being called Yuu-chan unexpectedly moved me since I've never had such a cute nickname before.

My usual nicknames were names like 'Hero'⁵ or 'Geruzoni'...

⁵ In case it wasn't clear, Hero, or Yuusha (勇者) is a pun on Yuuta's (勇太) name.

All of my usual nicknames were strange... Let's not tell Amaniji-senpai about them.

"Now then."

Amaniji-senpai carried on with a smile.

"About this morning's tale – well? What's DevTru Rikka-chan saying about it?"

"No – especially since we stopped in the middle of the tale."

"Really."

Amaniji-senpai didn't look anxious at all.

I was a little confused, since she seemed completely different from this morning, where she was extremely passionate about her request. This upperclassman had given up on her request – such an unlikely scenario was probably not the case, but even so I was doubtful that there was another explanation.

Even though I had only gotten acquainted with Amaniji-senpai today, but from what I had seen so far, I couldn't help but think that she really wasn't an ordinary person.

"Guess there's no choice: we'll go prostrate ourself to Yuu-chan again tomorrow."

"Don't!"

As expected, Amaniji-senpai tilted her head in response to my reply.

Seeing her tilt her composed face curiously made me feel relieved.

Although I haven't known her for very long, it was strange that improbable responses like that felt Amaniji-senpai-like...

"Really? But we were resolving to prostrate ourself to you every day."

"A resolution like that should make you waver!"

It's a terrible resolution.

It's too M.

"Understood; if that's what Yuu-chan says, then it can't be helped. We'll say that prostrating was too normal and no longer interesting and stop doing it."

"You thought it was interesting..."

It's only interesting if you say it's interesting... A person like that isn't normal.

"Well then, tell us what it is that you wanted of us to do for you! We'll do anything!"

"Your intentions haven't changed....?"

"That's not it! Since we've renting Yuu-chan's beloved girlfriend, we have to do what we can to make it up to you!"

"...Oh, then, could you please be normal for the time being?"

"Sorry, no can do!"

"Your attitude sure changed quickly!"

"Isn't there anything else? As long as it isn't normal, we'll do anything!"

".....No...there's nothing in particular..."

"No way!? That's unusual! Anything at all?"

"Anything...huh?"

"Yes, anything! Don't normal high school boys say things like 'Yahoo, anything at all! Nevertheless, for now let's begin with baking a naan⁶!' when that's the case?"

"Please apologise to all the high school boys around the world!"

The heck, that seems to be a boy with a low level of intelligence.

He was the opposite of normal.

"We see, we see. Yuu-chan's quite idiosyncratic! Well, whatever, you don't need to think of something right away. Rather, just tell when you stumble across some weird idea. It has to be something that other people won't do though – apologies for not being able to do normal things."

Amaniji-senpai said all of that at once, with no hesitation at all in her words.

She seriously didn't hesitate at all.

"And, because we're willing to do anything for Yuu-chan, we want Yuu-chan to take part in the play as well!"

"Take part in the play...?"

Ahhh... I see. Win me over.

I forgot about those words as at that time I was completely ignoring her, but it seemed that was Amaniji-senpai's original intention for coming to my house.

In that sense, the conversation had been progressing extremely smoothly.

After all, Rikka did say that she wouldn't take part in the play if I wasn't in it.

"Umm... do you not want to?"

"It's not that that I don't want to, but... Amaniji-senpai, wasn't your aim to have only Rikka take part in the play?"

"To be frank, that was our plan at first. Winning you over was solely for the sake of having DevTru Rikka-chan, but... but now, we really want Yuu-chan to take part too! Yuu-

⁶ Oven-baked flatbread, originated from Asia.

chan was more eccentric than we imagined! As expected of DevTru Rikka-chan's boyfriend! You look great in female clothing!"

"Ugh...!"

I couldn't say anything in response to that.

My face turned completely red; I was at a complete loss at what to do.

"Ahaha, looks like praising you so much like that made you embarrassed about being embarrassed!"

"Wrong! Also, it didn't feel like you were praising me at all!?"

"You're embarrassed again! Yeah, without a doubt, we definitely want Yuu-chan to take part too."

"...Um, although I'm a bit late in saying this, but wouldn't it be better to ask people like your friends instead of Rikka and I –"

"Nope, that's impossible."

Amaniji-senpai spoke over me, with "impossible" being said in a flat tone.

I didn't mean to say "it would be better to ask your friends" in such a non-hesitant manner.

I was feeling remorseful for saying something unpleasant like that, but Amaniji-senpai didn't look unhappy at all. Her facial expression was the same as before – no, her facial expression was much brighter than before.

"See, it's because of our selfishness. Since we're part of the 'Eccentric Drama Club'. If we had to do something with others, we'd prefer to do it with other eccentric people. That's why it has to be DevTru Rikka-chan and Yuu-chan!"

And just like that, smiling as she talked, she changed the subject to something lighter.

I felt a little relieved about the situation. However –

"Ha... but seriously, why Rikka? It doesn't seem like the two of you have talked with each other before, and to say that she's strange based on looks alone is..."

I've been curious about this for a long time now.

I think I've been curious ever since Amaniji-senpai said "It has to be Rikka." Even though she did say, during this morning's incident, that she decided on Rikka based on her unique appearance, nevertheless that still didn't feel like a reason to stick with Rikka.

"...Yuu-chan, DevTru Rikka-chan – what do you think of Rikka-chan?"

"Eh?"

"And, not from the viewpoint of a boyfriend – we're asking how Yuu-chan sees DevTru Rikka-chan."

“...Err, umm, she’s a little peculiar –”

“Yeah, that!” Amaniji-senpai said while pointing at me. And smiling.

“Yes, anyone who saw her would think that she’s extremely eccentric. We used our rule of thumb, ‘cannot do normal’, to tell that she wasn’t normal.”

“.....”

“Oh, sorry, we didn’t mean that in a bad way. Rather, we meant it as a very great compliment. And that’s exactly why we wanted to grow closer to DevTru Rikka-chan. We also had ulterior motives for doing so too.”

“... I absolutely won’t hand Rikka over.”

“Aha, AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!”

“Ugh... you’re laughing too much...”

“Ahaha, no, ah, sorry sorry. Hehe, still, Yuu-chan said that pretty cutely. Normally, you don’t say something like that to a woman with ulterior motives: it’s too strange!”

...Hmm, now that you mention it that might be true.

But to be fair, there has been some charming people around me lately. As a result, I may have unconsciously responded a little too sensitively.

“Well, that’s why it would be no good if it wasn’t DevTru Rikka-chan. In that sense, if you get what we mean, we were pleased about being out of luck.”

“Yeah, I can vaguely understand what Amaniji-senpai’s trying to say.”

Certainly, Rikka may be ‘abnormal’.

At the very beginning, I too was also charmed by that kind of atmosphere. She was different from others – that is, she was a chuunibyou patient.

“By out of luck, we mean that there were no interesting people around me. See, that’s the reason why our club has so few members.”

“...Is that so?”

Well, if there was a person who wanted to join the same club that Amaniji-senpai is in, they’d probably have quite the personality.

I was wondering if such a person could even exist, but then I remembered that I had already been told that there was another member. I’m a bit interested as to the type of person they were.

I’m certain, however, that they were a person similar to Amaniji-senpai.

“So, how about it? Can the two of you take part together?”

“...Hmm.”

I didn't have a reason to refuse. However, I didn't have an obligation to help either.

Regardless, at any rate, right before my eyes was a troubled person, and if I can help – and I think my poor abilities were sufficient enough to help – then I should help.

However, if I go help Amaniji-senpai, then Rikka would likely come help with the play too.

After all, Rikka did say something along those lines this morning.

Since that was the case, then there still was the issue of Rikka's Cultural Festival workload to consider.

It felt too early for me to give an answer right now.

"Um, I don't have a problem in helping – Rikka might though, do you mind if I double-check with her about this?"

"Really? You're helping!?"

"Well, I still haven't decided yet... I should be able to give you an answer tomorrow, but..."

"Yeah! That's fine, thanks! Yuu-chan, you're a lifesaver! Then tomorrow, come to the club room!"

Extremely moved, Amaniji-senpai used both hands to take my right hand, grasping my hand tightly.

I could tell that she definitely wasn't feeling a "normal" type of joy, but since she was so happy it seems that some of that happiness passed onto me.

My face broke into a smile by itself.

"It's still a bit early to say, but for time the being it looks like the play is going to happen. To be completely honest, we really wanted another person for the play, but oh well. Guess it can't be helped."

"One more?"

"Yeah, since it's meant to be a play starring five people. However, although it's difficult, it's possible to perform the play with three people. That's why, at the very least, we needed to have three actors."

Another person – huh?

Another interesting person – another eccentric person.

Although Amaniji-senpai thinks that there isn't anyone else who would qualify as interesting, there was one person that came to mind that she'll certainly be satisfied with.

It felt like I could even hear her voice going "nyahahahaha".

Anyway, it seemed that Amaniji-senpai hasn't noticed her yet.

If she had, she definitely would have approached her already.

She had a presence that was even more overwhelming than Rikka's.

"Um, if we are looking for one more person to help – I know someone who you would find interesting... Do you want me to ask?"

"Eh, really? There's another person? Our observation was lacking?"

"Yes, it's someone who had just transferred recently, but I can guarantee that it's someone you'll find interesting. I'm not sure if they'll be willing to help, but if Amaniji-senpai's good with it then I'll talk to them about it."

My chest puffed out a little as I answered with confidence.

Agreeing to what I said, Amaniji-senpai nodded vigorously and bashfully showed a look of relief.

"Hmm. If it's someone that Yuu-chan recommends, they'll surely be great! However, if they fail to match our expectations on the day we meet, we'd reject them on the spot. Is that okay with you?"

"Yeah, that's fine. I'm certain that they'll be able to match your expectations."

"By the way, is that person a girl?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, that person's a girl."

"....."

It became silent again. Suddenly, the atmosphere felt tense.

Did I say something bad...?

While I was feeling unnerved by an atmosphere like that, Amaniji-senpai said something to me with a playful expression.

As if it was something that really amusing to make fun of.

Something grand to make fun of.

"Hasn't it been a while since you started dating? There's another girl in the picture, it's making my heart throb. A special fetish? Are we not right? Most couples are highly likely to break up after being together for around three to six months!"

Chapter 4: Eccentric Drama Club

“By the way, Yuuta. Recently it’s been a bit formulaic —”

“We are!?”

Don’t just say something sad like that without any warning! I’m on the verge of tears here!

Yesterday, Amaniji-senpai said that the dangerous time-period for couples was three to six months after they started dating, right!? I don’t know if that was true or not since this is my first-time dating, but perhaps I was the only one who thought that we were progressing smoothly!?

Afterwards.

Or more precisely, after Amaniji-senpai made fun of me yesterday. Satisfied with that, Amaniji-senpai said “We’ve stayed for way too long, sorry! Well then, see you later!” in a hurry and went home.

Since I asked her to, she left through the front door.

And now, back to the present – lunch time.

It was right in the middle of lunch time, and it was just the two of us on the school’s rooftop.

Incidentally, about this rooftop – while there was the possibility of someone else intruding, since it was hot on the rooftop it seemed that only people with strange tastes (I guess we were the sort of weird people who would come up here) would come up here; so far, we still haven’t met anyone else on this rooftop. As a result, I guess you could call it something like a private space for the two of us.

The azure sky – since the seasons had changed, maybe I should be calling it the autumnal sky instead.

Nevertheless, although it was September, the blazing sun was still scorching down on us.

In order to avoid such a hell, we were hiding in the shade, and while we were sitting on the ground eating our bentos, having our usual fun whimsical conversations, there was suddenly some sad news from Rikka.

I think there were some tears in my eyes.

“You’re completely wrong.”

Rikka-san had a sullen face. She was really angry.

Although she won't tell me why, recently she's been wearing the eyepatch a lot again. As a result, I could only check with one of her eyes, but that left eye of hers was staring at me with a cold gaze.

So I was wrong... I'm glad, really glad...

"I'm sorry... I jumped to conclusions. ...So, what's become formulaic?"

"The recent *Aggressive Aliens* ☆ *Secret Manual*."

In case you didn't know, it was Rikka's favourite magazine to read.

Ever since that one time when Yumeha borrowed it, she's been pestering me to "borrow it againnn", giving me the opportunity to read the following publications. I certainly couldn't deny the feeling that the content was getting repetitive.

Well, since it's meant to be about stuff that you don't know about aliens, I guess it's understandable that there'll be less and less things to write about.

"I want them to introduce more new kinds of aliens."

"New kind of aliens...? Like...?"

"Recently there has been lots of anime about various aliens coming to Japan. They should introduce those."

"If they did that, wouldn't it just become an ordinary anime magazine!?"

It's M*gami Magazine!⁷ Or NyanT*PE!⁸ ...Its secret is that all the aliens are pretty girls.

"I want to see lots of new kinds of aliens! Yuuta, what can you share?"

"Don't talk as if I have some kind of secret tool that I can freely use! It's impossible after all!"

"Oof... Looks like it can't be helped. Yuuta, let's summon one together!"

"You can summon aliens!?"

But I thought that aliens only come for stuff like invasion or sightseeing. They're not demons... But hey, maybe you could summon something alien-like.

If that's the case, then at least we would at least be able to communicate with it.

"Elohim Essaim, Elohim Essaim⁹."

"Don't cast the Baranga Baranga¹⁰ spell! And that summons a demon!"

⁷ Megami Magazine

⁸ NyanTYPE.

⁹ Originally from the *Grand Grimoire*, also known as *The Red Dragon*. Made popular in Japan by the manga series *Akuma-kun*. Used to summon demons.

¹⁰ Also a reference to *Akuma-kun*. Still about summoning demons.

“Oof. Alright then, in that case – Yuuta, you must immediately do the alien-summoning dance.”

“...Wait, don’t you know? I can’t dance at all...”

“Is that so... Yuuta can’t even do the first part of radio calisthenics... Even though you’re the Demon King, how regrettable...”

...Don’t speak with such a dejected tone, it’s making me feel down.

Or rather, that’s calisthenics, not dancing.

Moreover, I’m able to do radio calisthenics up to the second part!

“Wait, if it’s a dance, wouldn’t it be better if you did it since you’re skilled at dancing? Ah, rather, I want to see you perform the dance for the cultural festival!”

When I said that, Rikka’s body twitched before turning to look towards me with her usual triumphant look, full of confidence.

Looking as if she was ready to show off what she could do, Rikka put her half-eaten bento down, quickly stood up and took an imposing stance right in front of me.

“Guess it can’t be helped. This is special, for Yuuta only.”

Saying that, she took half a step back and did a spin. Naturally, it was a horizontal spin. At that instant, her skirt gently floated in the air– but I couldn’t see that forbidden secret part of hers. Regardless, I was excited.

And then, even though there was no music, she captivated me with – I mean, performed for me – that cute dance of hers.

Rikka had the stage to herself – both figuratively and literally.

Even though I knew that, I was still impressed by her movements.

In fact, it felt that she was even on the same level as the dance club. Well, that might just be due to my bias though.

As she finished a portion of the dance without breaking a sweat, Rikka had a huge smile on her face. I gave a round of applause to Rikka as well.

“How was it? My wild war dance?”

“Eh... I liked it...?”

I’m not certain about why she’s happy – was it because she was able to perform the dance for me, or was it because she was able to use a cool phrase like that...

Clearing my throat, I gave my revised opinion.

“I mean, yeah, it was the strongest! Have you really mastered the dance already?”

“Naturally! It’s already perfect. I’m able to master anything instantly by using the power of the Devilish Truth Stare. In addition, the Devilish Truth Stare also has the ability to make an exact copy of anything. It can even freely steal the abilities of my enemies. Haaaaa, Dark Phoenix Blazing Wave!”

“Shichimiya’s technique has already been stolen!?”

“I can also use this. Flames of love!”

“Ple-please don’t use that readily...”

It wasn’t something that can be used freely.

It’s an ability that potentially exceeds the power of the Devilish Truth Stare...

Then again, Devilish Truth Stare: it can manipulate the five elements, manipulate gravity, use telekinesis, and could seemingly manipulate fate. And now that I think about it, yesterday she told me that it could also manipulate time. On top of that, she seemed to have something like a nullify ability nullification ability (despite bringing it up, I’m not quite sure what that ability is either) – its setting as the strongest wasn’t just for show.

Anyway, the class performance – looks like it was already perfect on the dance front.

If Rikka was going to be burdened by the request, while I would feel bad for Amaniji-senpai, I was intending to refuse, but looks like there may be no need to worry about that.

Well, until I have asked her properly I have no idea if she’d help or not, so I still had to ask Rikka about it.

For now, I’ll start by gently bringing up the subject.

“Say, about what we talked about yesterday –”

“What we talked about yesterday? You mean about how Yuuta cried after reading *Gon, the Little Fox*¹¹?”

“Let’s not talk about thaaat!”

Even though I did cry after reading it – even though it happened!

I mean, why did you suddenly bring that up!?

“I also cried yesterday. I had a terrible dream where Mori-sama was using my Devilish Truth Stare.”

“...That certainly is a terrible dream to have!”

“Yeah, and when I thought that it really happened... I was scared and wondered if I should call Yuuta, but then I thought that it would be hard for you to come to my house at 2 o’clock in the middle of the night... so I endured it.”

¹¹ A Japanese children’s story about the life of a little fox called Gon.

“But I would go!? Even if it was at 2 o’clock I’d go!?”

“Ooh, as expected of the King of the Night! Just hearing it makes me feel relieved.”

“No no, that’s not it... Look, yesterday, we talked about the cultural festival, didn’t we?”

“The cultural festival? Ah, you mean about how Yuuta was troubled about which Batoen¹² to use in the Batoen tournament?”

“But there’s no tournament like that scheduled at our cultural festival!?”

I’ve never seen a Batoen before though. Or rather, why do you know about battle pencils?

Regardless, it seemed pretty plain for a tournament...

“Hmm? ...Maybe that was a dream then?”

“Rikka, what kind of incredible dreams are you having... Look, it’s about the play.”

“Play? Ah, Arc-san.”

Rikka had a look that implied that she finally knew (it seemed that she only just remembered) what I was talking about.

I thought that her expression was on purpose since she was still playing the funny man, but it seemed that she was being serious.

“How did you find Arc-san?”

“Well, you see, yesterday Arc-san – Amaniji-senpai – abruptly came up into my room.”

Literally. Abruptly came up. Will this fact be conveyed to Rikka?

“Abruptly came up into Yuuta’s room!? Arc-san has the ability to fly!?”

“It got conveyed!”

“As expected of Arc-san...! I don’t have the ability to fly... Looks like I can’t be Yuuta’s swallow after all...?”

“Weren’t you lavished with abilities just now!? Well... it’s fine, since Rikka’s other abilities are absolutely overwhelming...”

“Ooh! Yeah, I’ll believe in your words Yuuta! By the way, why did Arc-san go to your house? Ah!? Maybe she’s the enemy!?”

“No, no, she’s definitely not the enemy. At the very least, she doesn’t seem like a bad person.”

¹² Batoen (バトエン) is short for Battle Pencil, a sort of trading card game but with pencils. The abbreviation of Batoen is used by the Square Enix version of the game.

But then again, I wasn't certain about that.

Although it was only based on my intuition, I couldn't believe that someone with such an easy-going personality would be a bad person. Then again, I couldn't say that she was a good person either.

If I had to be precise, I'd say that she's a strange person.

"So why Yuuta's house?"

"Umm, she came to win me over I guess."

"A monster!? She's the enemy after all!?"

"We already did that joke yesterday!"

Seems like Rikka's thought process was similar to Amaniji-senpai's.

Actually, would it be better to say that they have similar tastes instead? If that's the case, then I too also have similar tastes to Amaniji-senpai...

"Anyways, it's about the play – she came to ask about it once again. So, what are your thoughts, Rikka?"

As I asked her about it, Rikka had a confused expression on her face. She let out a small "hmm".

"There's no problem about it on my end. On the dance front, I'm fine. However, why me?"

"Hmm, well Amaniji-senpai did say that she thinks your personality is rather unique."

"...Unique? But I'm normal...?" said Rikka as she tilted her head slightly, as if questioning that conclusion.

However, "I'm normal" – for Amaniji-senpai, it felt like the exact opposite is true.

I also think that Rikka is one of the most unique people I know. I mean, among my acquaintances, she'd be competing for first or second place in terms of eccentricity. By the way, the other person's Shichimiya.

I'm not sure if it was because they are chuunibyou patients, but their measure of what's eccentric is different from other people's.

However, I'm certain that they believe themselves to be normal. While they might think that they're doing something normally, to others it looked extremely unique.

Then again.

For Amaniji-senpai, they definitely wouldn't be categorised as "normal".

Excessive acting – thinking back on what happened yesterday, adopting a fictional persona certainly is very similar to playing the leading role in a play.

In some respects, it was like you were showing off how unique you were compared to everyone else –

“By the way, Yuuta – are you going to help out as well?”

Rikka asked me a question, interrupting my thoughts.

Since my thoughts were interrupted so abruptly, I was a little shocked, leading me to be a little jittery in my reply.

“Eh, ah, yeah. But I’m only helping out if Rikka’s helping out as well.”

“I see. Yeah, that is a very Yuuta-like thing to do. The King’s willing to do anything to gain a servant. Looks like Yuuta’s reverting back to being the type of Demon King that is kind to his subjects.”

“I-I’m regressing!?”

“To be honest, I too am reverting back to being the wielder of the Devilish Truth Stare.”

It’s another new setting! I mean, didn’t you inherit it from your father!?

Looks like I won’t be able to grasp the setting anytime soon.

“Haa. Don’t misunderstand. Even though it is a regression, the inheritance of the Devilish Truth Stare is hereditary.”

“.....”

“... I just wanted to try using that explanation for a bit...”

It was being tsunshun in a different way¹³. Try being tsun-like, and you’ll understand that feeling depressed makes it a different personality! YES, MANIAC!¹⁴

“We-well, but remember that I’m only helping if Rikka’s helping too.”

“I’ll do it too! Since Yuuta’s said he’ll help, I’ll do it too! It’s only natural since you’re my contractee.”

“O-oh.”

It was quite rare for Rikka to press me like that with such a menacing attitude.

Then again, maybe she was burning with jealousy since I already planned on helping.

¹³ Tsunshun (ツンしゅん), a character archetype similar to a tsundere, but rather than warming up to others later they get sad later about their actions. Reference to Inu x Boku SS.

¹⁴ Also a reference to Inu x Boku SS. Said as a catchphrase of one of the characters when she sees something arousing.

Jealously – while I was happy that she felt that way, since we had already gotten in a quarrel due to it before, I had to properly explain the situation to her so that she doesn't misunderstand me.

Yeah, I absolutely have to make sure that I explain it well.

Explaining the situation – but I can't really do that without first telling Rikka about Shichimiya's and her role in the play.

Ever since that incident, Rikka hasn't shown anything like jealousy at all – rather, the two of them are on very good terms with each other.

Due to that, I wasn't not particularly anxious about it, but it was probably still better to tell her now rather than later.

"Oh, so we're both helping then. Ah, I'm not certain, but Shichimiya might be helping out as well."

"Sofia as well?"

"Yeah, since Amaniji-senpai said that in addition to both you and me, she wanted to have one more person. And because Shichimiya's the only who could meet Amaniji-senpai's demands, I was planning on asking her afterwards to help out."

"I see. Sofia and the play – yeah, seems like it's going to be fun!" replied Rikka, who was in high spirits.

Seems like I was worried about nothing. I mean, Rikka saying "seems like it's going to be fun" shows just how close the two of them have gotten, which made me happy.

"Well then, for now, how about we go visit Amaniji-senpai after school today?"

"Understood."

And with a nod, Rikka finally returned back to her spot right next to me.

After that, she finished off her bento's side dish in one mouthful before immediately turning straight towards me, staring into my eyes with a serious expression.

"By the way Yuuta. I believe it's necessary for you to explain what happened yesterday in a little more detail. First of all, why Yuuta's place? I'm sure that there were other methods though? She's the enemy after all?"

...Even though I've already said this before, but it seems like Rikka's feeling quite jealous – on one hand, it makes me feel happy; on the other, it's making me swear once again to try to not give off the wrong impression.



It was after school.

I was by myself, heading to class 1-3 to visit Shichimiya.

Although Rikka said, “I’ll go with you,” I had Rikka stay at the classroom since whenever the two of them meet, it creates a mysterious space where a battle unfolds, derailing the conversation.

Class 1-3.

I didn’t have a friend who I could ask about Shichimiya’s whereabouts since I don’t know anyone else in that class (well, I wasn’t friends with anyone in the other classes either, so it’s not just limited to class 1-3...), so I was checking whether Shichimiya was here or not from outside the classroom.

In the classroom, there were a few girls who stayed behind, but no Shichimiya.

Looks like class 1-3 wasn’t one of the classes who had lots of people stay behind after school to help with the cultural festival preparations.

Since that’s the case, I’m guessing that Shichimiya had already gone home as well.

I actually wanted to talk to her in person about it, but it looked like that was impossible.

I pulled out my cellphone from my pocket and called Shichimiya.

Speaking of Shichimiya’s cellphone – and don’t criticise me for calling it that, I’m well aware that it’s more accurate to call it a smartphone – this would be the first time that I’ve called her number since she had given it to me.

As this was my first time calling her, I was a bit nervous.

“Even though smartphones were spreading at an abnormal rate, I’ll remain a believer of gara-keis¹⁵ until the very end!” was the type of worthless chuuni thoughts I was having as I made the call. It only rang once.

It seems that I was connected instantly.

“Ah, hey –”

“Nyahahahaha, O.K. ☆.”

...The call ended.

Wait, wait, even if you were mimicking someone, to suddenly cut the call off like that... D-does, does she hate me?

That’d make me really sad...

I thought about emailing her about the matter, but I decided, as I prepared myself to be sad again, to give her another call instead – at that moment.

¹⁵ The traditional Japanese feature rich flip-phone.

“My dark scarf is charged with magic power – it’s glistering with the destructive energy of the Demon Duchess! As you wished, the Magical Demon Duchess, Sofia-chan, is here!”

Standing behind me with her arms crossed in a daunting pose, all the while laughing “nyahahahaha”, Shichimiya made her speech. When did she...

More importantly, I was a bit concerned about how others would see this.

Even though it was true that it was noisier than how it usually is after school since most classes were busy preparing for the cultural festival, saying something like that in such a loud voice would still garner the attention of everyone around us.

Well, whatever... I was already used to things like that by now.

“Since when did you get there...?”

“What a foolish question, Hero. I’m always by your side.”

“What a cool line... Wait, no, that’s not it. Why did you hang up on me? It gave me quite the shock.”

“Hero, it’s not like that at all. Simply knowing that you’re calling for me is enough. In fact, you don’t even have to use your phone – even just wishing “help!” in your heart is enough to make me come right away.”

“Doesn’t that make you the hero then!?”

Sigh.

Shichimiya Satone – she was still as cool as ever.

And as usual, her condition as a chuuninyou patient was in no way inferior to Rikka’s ...I honestly believe that Shichimiya’s the ultimate type of chuunibyou patient.

Being self-aware of having chuunibyou, and yet persisting with it.

That’s why I’m convinced that she could change even the impossible.

While the basis of my confidence happened to be really evil-eye chuunibyou-like, but if she was going to change something, you would probably be able to feel the enormous power that she would be pouring into the change.

Undoubtedly, she is the sort of person who would leave her name behind in the world when she passes away.

Even though Shichimiya had only transferred in recently, she seems to already be fitting in with the rest of the class.

In the olden days, she was fine with being a loner, but it seems that was no longer the case anymore.

Since I was only familiar with how she was like in her first year of middle school, I'm not sure what caused her to change, but I think that it was good that she did.

Maybe meeting Nibutani and me had something to do with it. If that's the case, then I'm glad we had met.

'My school life's a lot of fun' was the sort of feeling I got from Shichimiya now.

Speaking of change, Shichimiya's uniform, like Rikka's, was remodelled.

I'm surrounded by people with remodelled uniforms. It's to the point where I'm worried about how a particular disciplinary member would see this.

In addition, although it's still hot, she was wearing a black scarf.

Needless to say, it was because she thinks it's cool.

Well, she was probably fine with wearing it in this type of weather. One time, when I asked her if she felt hot wearing that, she replied: "Hot? Nyahaha~, what a foolish question, it's actually rather refreshing to wear. My heart which loves the world is a million degrees after all~☆."

Seriously, she's more of a hero than I am.

"Anyways, Hero. What exactly is it that you wanted me to help you with? Well, then again, even without knowing what it's about I'm already more or less willing to help Hero out."

"I'm really grateful about the fact that you're already willing to help me out, but I... I'm pretty sure that I haven't asked for you to help me out yet."

"Hm? But it could only be a call for help if Hero was trying to contact me so urgently."

What a cool line.

However, if that's the case, then it means I can't call Shichimiya casually at all...

"That's not true, but, well, you're right about me needing help. If it's okay with you, I'd like for you to help me out for a bit. By the way Shichimiya, what's your class doing for the cultural festival? It doesn't seem like there's any sort of preparation going on for it.

"What's my class doing? My class is the only one in our year level that's doing a food stall. Preparations for it will probably start right before the cultural festival begins."

"Eh, so that's what your class is doing. What are you going to sell at your food stall?"

"We'll be making parfaits, sundaes, *Manga Time Ki*ra*, stuff like that¹⁶. Hm? Is there something wrong with that?"

¹⁶ A pun about similarly named manga/magazines: *Parfait Tic* (shoujo manga), *Weekly Shounen Sunday*, and *Manga Time Kirara*.

"If there's nothing wrong, doesn't that mean that you're just selling regular magazines!?"

"Nyahaha, thanks for the retort. It was a slip of the tongue, I meant to say crepe☆."

"It was a slip of the tongue... Umm, so you'll only be busy on the day of the cultural festival, right?"

"Yep, that's right! By the way, since I'll only be transformed as the Magical Demon Duchess to serve parfaits for only a short while, please come visit me then!"

"Oh, of course I'll come over! I want to eat the parfait!"

"Nyahaha, looks like Hero's still got a sweet tooth. Yep, Hero's sweet!"

"Wait, isn't the meaning completely different if you phrase it like that...?"

It didn't seem like there was much of a correlation between liking sweet things and being a sweet person...

Me... I wonder if I'm sweet.

"Anyway, you probably want to hear a bit more about the request – ah, but if you want to refuse, please feel free to do so, it's not a –"

"It's okay. I definitely won't refuse☆."

"O-oh. Thanks. Err, let's see, a certain upperclassman of mine wants to perform a play for the cultural festival, but since there aren't enough actors, I was wondering if you could lend a hand. So that's why, Shichimiya, I'm asking you if you would be willing to help her out."

"There aren't enough actors... I see. Nyahaha, giving me a request like that feels a bit off! It's too easy. Since it was a request from Hero, I was expecting it to be about saving the world, or something like that."

"Tsk, tsk, tsk," said Shichimiya as she wagged her finger with a triumphant look on her face.

...Then again, it's true that if she was able to do something like that, then something like acting should be a cinch.

Still, if I asked you to then the world will be saved, huh.

But, then again, since it's Shichimiya, it would end up being something like her sacrificing herself to save the world, so I couldn't really ask that of her.

If such a time does come, then I'd save the world together with her.

After all, there was no reason to not save the world.

"I see, so you're willing to help out; that's good to hear. In that case, let's go greet my upperclassman together. I was planning on visiting her place now anyway."

“Oh, please wait a minute.”

Right as I pivoted myself around and I started to walk off, Shichimiya suddenly grasped onto the hem of my uniform.

Since my uniform was being pulled, I turned around.

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

“Umm... even if we don’t hurry, it should be fine, right? Nyahahahaha: after all, Hero, you don’t usually come to my class.”

“Is, is that so?”

Although what she said was troubling, it was true.

Normally, breaks between classes are for moving between classrooms. And if there was no need to change classrooms, then I usually chat with someone like Rikka or Isshiki.

In addition, since we were in different classes, it was a bit hard to just head in like that.

But, then again, she always comes to my class to have a chat with me.

“That’s, that’s right ...Why, my friend, you coming over to talk about stuff such as plans for world domination or BanBan¹⁷ would be like a dream come true!”

“Shichimiya, what exactly is it that you want to do with the world...?”

Please be clear as to whether you wanted to save or conquer the world.

...Well, putting that aside.

I noticed. No – that was a bad way of putting it.

I didn’t just notice it, I’d already noticed it. I couldn’t have not noticed it.

That Shichimiya’s smile was a façade masking her feeling of awkwardness.

I think that it was good that I noticed.

If I didn’t know why she may have been feeling awkward, then I probably wouldn’t have noticed it.

I couldn’t completely fathom what she was feeling, so I may have been slightly off the mark, but I think I can sort of imagine what she was feeling.

That is, a feeling of awkwardness as a result of being recently rejected by me in a rather grandiose way.

Between the two of us – there was this subtle sense of distance.

¹⁷ BanBan (バンバン) is an old Japanese folkgroup.

That's why I wasn't sure about how I should be acting around her.

I mean, I might be overthinking things.

Still, I definitely didn't want to trample over Shichimiya's feelings for a second time.

Because of all that – I contacted Shichimiya normally.

I contacted Shichimiya, who couldn't help but smile despite feeling troubled, normally.

I didn't know if that was the right thing to do. It may have just been my ego.

I mean, I didn't even know how Shichimiya thinks of me now.

Still, for Shichimiya and I – I want us to always be happy when we are together.

"Well, in that case, let's talk about how we can save the world, since I have no interest in conquering it."

"Nyahaha~, I'm always available for a consultation! ...Yeah, in that case, I too will also get into chat-time mode! Come now, it's time to chat!"

"....."

Looks like she really wanted to just have a chat...

No no, that can't be right. It was definitely Shichimiya attempt of trying to deal with this awkward mood, or something like that.

"Oh, right, on the topic of protecting the world, that reminds me: I'm pretty certain that Jeanne d'Arc had a severe case of chuunibyou!"

"Hey, apologize to Jeanne d'Arc-san!"

What are you saying all of a sudden!? That's how you start a conversation!?

Still, the topic was a bit interesting...

"No, you got it wrong, I really admire Jeanne d'Arc! Didn't you know, Hero? That Jeanne d'Arc was a saint? A messiah? That her stylish alias was 'The Maid of Orléans'?"

"That certainly does sound a great deal like the vocabulary of a chuunibyou patient! But Jeanne-san never referred to herself like that, right!?"

"Quite the contrary! And she could even listen to the archangel's voice! She's cool!"

"Urgh... that really is chuuni-ish!"

"And she's a Valkyrie! She's super cool!"

"Eh...? Now that you mention it... it seems like that's true... I've only know about it from social studies classes, so I'm not too familiar with the fine detail, but to disguise herself as a man in order to save Orléans – she really does seem like an amazing person...!"

“And in her last moments she was seen as a witch – well, she probably wasn’t very delighted about it, but it once again makes me think that she’s cool! A hero who’s seen as a witch: that’s just like a Magical Demon Duchess!”

“No, I don’t think she used magic...”

I couldn’t stop myself from groaning that small retort.

No, there’s still the matter of treating a hero of the past as a chuunibyou patient, but I guess someone with chuunibyou would definitely interpret it as a luscious setting.

“However, it is sad that she was treated like a heretic.”

“Yeah, it definitely was.”

A heretic – a distinct existence, right?

For some reason, when I heard the word heretic, I thought of Amaniji-senpai.

But, for her, it felt like she wanted to be known as a heretic. I wonder why?

“By the way, Hero: this isn’t related to our chat just now, but who exactly is this upperclassman? What’s the story behind her suddenly appearing and asking you for help?”

“Oh, I haven’t told you about her yet. I actually don’t know her all that well. Still, since you’ve just transferred, I wonder if you’ve seen her yet? The upperclassman who’s a year level above us who’s known as Rainbow-senpai –”

“Ah, I’ve seen her. Her aura was terrifying. Since I didn’t know what would happen if I saw such an aura up-close, I’ve been cautious of her and have only seen her from afar.”

“Is her aura really that terrifying...?”

Ability users being able to detect auras feels fictitious.

However, Rikka did say something along those lines as well. Seems like it was something that only another ability user would understand.

“Well, since you’ve already seen her before, it makes explaining things easier. That person – she’s Amaniji-senpai. At first, she only planned on asking Rikka for help, and I get the impression that she went from place to place until she finally ended up at my house. As a result, Rikka ended up agreeing to help, but since there still wasn’t enough people for the play I’ve come to you to ask for your help.”

As I said that, Shichimiya crossed her arms once again, visibly nodding her head and murmuring ‘hmmm’ to show that she understood.

“Hmm, I see. Naturally, Hero’s also helping this Amaniji-senpai out, right?”

“Ah, yeah, but, well, it’s not like I’m helping out that much.”

The moment those words left my mouth, I felt a sense of déjà vu.

No, it wasn’t just déjà vu – didn’t I say something similar to that pretty recently?

“Nyahahahaha, it looks like Hero really does think like a hero! That sort of thing is what I really love about you☆.”

Because of its various implications, I was startled by the words that Shichimiya said with a smile. My slightly distraught face seemed to have transmitted my shock to Shichimiya.

Realising what her words could have meant, Shichimiya’s face froze in the exact same way as mine for an instant. Her cheeks were a bit red as she tried to smooth things over:

“Nyahaha, that didn’t come out right. ...Sorry. No, well, but I really do love Hero’s heroic way of thinking! I really admire you – you’re my rival after all, since I’m a demon!”

To restore the cheerful mood that we had before, I too replied with a smile on my face.

“Yeah, thanks. I’m not sure what to think after being told that I think heroically, but if it was a compliment then I guess I’ll happily accept it.”

“Yeah, yeah, it’s a compliment! Well then, it’s probably good that we hurry, and even if it’s bad we should still hurry to that Amaniji-senpai’s place!”

In order to gloss over what just happened, Shichimiya strengthened her tone.

...Well, it was Shichimiya’s fault that we started chatting – of course I didn’t say that.

After returning to the classroom that Rikka was waiting in with Shichimiya, we met up with Rikka (sure enough, the moment they met a battle started to unfold, but I’ll omit that part) and the three of us headed to the clubroom of the ‘Eccentric Drama Club’.



“Oh, right. Their clubroom’s the principal’s office.”

After we left the classroom, I told the two of them where Amaniji-senpai’s clubroom was supposedly located.

Sure enough, both of them found that to be strange – they were both visibly baffled by what I just said.

But then again, I probably had the same expression on my face when I heard that from Amaniji-senpai yesterday.

“Isn’t the principal’s office the room where the principal is? How do you perform club activities in a place like that?”

Shichimiya raised the question that was on everyone’s minds.

I’m not exactly certain what the principal’s office was actually like, but my mental image of it is that it was a wide and spacious room. Although there probably will be enough space for us to rehearse the play there, it didn’t feel like it was an appropriate place for club activities.

“Well, I guess we’ll find out how once we get there, so let’s go.”

“Nyahahahaha, that’s right! Still, since the principal gives off the impression of being the boss of the school, I’m a bit excited! It feels like that the three of us are the party members of the elite few who are taking the last boss. Ah, since that’s the feeling I’m getting, let’s do our best, ‘kay! Hero! Rikka-chan!”

“I see, understood,” said Rikka formally as she nodded in consent.

...For some reason, the two of them were getting ready to enter in a showdown against the principal.

Although that wasn’t our actual goal, when it comes to facing that principal as an opponent, it’s strange how you could, just like Shichimiya said, describe such an encounter as fighting the last boss.

Our principal definitely does appear to be very strong.

Whether it’s the school’s entrance ceremony, the announcement for an excursion, or even the opening ceremony just a few days ago, our principal was certainly a bit over-the-top... If we end up having to greet our principal... I could feel the weight behind my steps.

Alright, guess I’ll also add some pep talk of my own then –

“Well then, let’s go. To fight the last boss.”

As I said that to the two of them, I took a single step forward.

To be honest, I was getting swept up by the mood.

Somehow, I ended up saying such a thing.

“Yuuta, you shouldn’t be the first one to go. Let me demonstrate that I, wielder of the Devilish Truth Stare, am the strongest. The likes of the principal will be buried in an instant. I’ll rend apart the darkness of our school. The world will be return to peace once again.”

As I turned my head around to look at Rikka as she started talking, her composed face had been, like I expected, transformed into her usual look of confidence.

Seriously, that’s quite a happy face you’ve got there, Rikka-san.

It surpassed the happy atmosphere that we just had.

Still, don’t say something like our school’s darkness! It sounds like our school’s corrupt!

“No no Rikka-san, please leave it to me, the Magical Demon Duchess. I suffered a defeat in our last bout, so let me take this one. This is my revenge match. It’d be enough for Rikka-chan and Hero to simply cheer for me from behind!”

...She was even more swept up by the mood than me—!

Reflecting upon my words, I shrugged my shoulders as I wearily advanced.

When the two of them are together, the mood soon becomes like this, which is quite hard to deal with... I regretted saying such a thing so lightly...

"Guess it can't be helped – I'll concede this time, Sofia. Do your best!"

"Nyahaha! Leave it to me, I've got this☆."

"...Sorry, this is my fault: if we meet the principal, please make the greeting normal..."

As I turned my head around once again to apologise for my rash comment, for some reason the two of them looked satisfied,

"It's Yuuta after all. With the Demon King's power, Yuuta will deliver divine punishment. Do your best!"

"As expected of Hero. Hero's keen to administer capital punishment with his power; do your best!"

and replied in complete sync.

Wow, it's like they're twins.

"No no, what kind of person are you making me out to be...?"

I'm a Demon King, a hero, and now a deva as well. This excessive setting is rather troubling.

Still, seeing the two of them being perfectly in sync was really moving.

It's beautiful how close they've gotten.

With the two of them, who were still caught up by the mood, holding their fun conversation behind me, the three of us headed towards the principal's office.

On the first floor, at the very end of the hallway.

In a place where not many people have set foot, a place that was dead silent – there laid the principal's office.

Needless to say, this was my first time coming here.

It was likely the same for the two behind me as well.

Since it was just before the cultural festival, almost the entire school was busy with preparations, so it was weird how this place alone was dead silent.

On the topic of this place's atmosphere, it was so unusually silent here that it honestly wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that this was area just before the last boss.

Well, it would be an exaggeration, but this place did sort of give off the impression that this was the save point before the last boss.

If that's the case, then this was the point of no return.

“Now then, I’ll repeat myself one more time. Our goal isn’t to defeat the principal. It’s to meet Amaniji-senpai. Okay?”

“Roger.”

“Nyahaha, okay☆.”

With Rikka’s acknowledgement and Shichimiya making a mysterious okay sign next to her cheeks, it seemed that there was no need for any further preparations, and so I knocked on the door of the principal’s office – I uttered “excuse me” before entering quietly.

Neither the principal nor Amaniji-senpai, who was our goal, was present.

Before my eyes – a scene that definitely wasn’t befitting of the principal’s office was unfolding.



Up until now, I’ve never entered the principal’s office, but it was exactly as I imagined it to be – there was a bookshelf embellished in trophies and a wall ornamented with framed certificates.

However, there was a scene before my eyes which, while frequently seen in a normal classroom, felt quite out-of-place in the principal’s office.

In front of the principal’s desk.

Sitting on the sofa which seemed to be for guests, with her arms on the table to use as a pillow, was a sleeping girl with drool spilling out of her mouth.

It was really strange.

Why are you sleeping in the principal’s office?

I was visibly dumbfounded by this and couldn’t say anything to Rikka and Shichimiya, who came in after me.

They were also speechless and had confused expressions on their faces.

I turned my attention towards the face of the sleeping girl, who was drooling.

Where have I seen her before – ah, that time in the nurse’s office.

I remember her clearly, as she had something scribbled on her forehead at that time.

If I’m not mistaken, it was the word “demon”.

There wasn’t anything on her forehead this time, so it doesn’t look like that was a special quirk of hers. Rather, it seemed like it was just a prank.

Nevertheless, she seemed like that type of person who would sleep anywhere... Naturally, I was curious as to how she could sleep in the principal’s office to the point where drool started to come out, but I also wanted to ask her about Amaniji-senpai’s whereabouts.

Since she's sleeping here, she was probably a member of the club too.

Alright, let's discuss this with the others.

"Well, it'd be bad if we left her with her drool hanging, so it's probably for the best to wake her up. Additionally, she might know something about Amaniji-senpai's whereabouts."

Since she was still sleeping, I was, for the time being, speaking to the others in a soft voice.

"Yuuta, you first. She might be an enemy."

From her downcast face, Rikka was indicating 'not me'.

She was invoking her 'shyness' skill.

...This was in spite of the fact that just a few moments ago, she said, among other things, that I shouldn't be the first to go.

"Yeah, yeah, this is a task for Hero. I don't know any spells that can awaken a sleeping person. I'm an offensive specialist, so I'm no good at support magic."

Shichimiya skilfully avoided the responsibility of waking her up.

Or rather, she was saying that I was a support-type hero who only knew spells with effects such as waking a sleeping person up...

A hero like that's sort of pathetic...

Still, I guess it would be weird if a useful spell like that didn't exist.

"Well, I thought that the female division would be better suited for such a task, but... I mean, it's not like I mind, but..."

In any case, it was a pity that the principal didn't suddenly return and exclaim, "Hey hey! It's no good to drool in the sacred principal's office! No good at all!" or something like that. Looks like it's up to me to wake her up.

I moved closer to her.

I felt really deplorable since my girlfriend was right next to me, but after looking at her face closely, her drool seemed to, as expected, make her look – no, maybe the drool only seemed cute since she was cute. Either way, drool or no drool – I thought that she was cute.

I considered shaking her awake, but I decided against it, as she may have been averse to having another guy touch her without any warning. Instead, I decided to wake her up by whispering to her.

"Umm, excuse me. Drool's hanging from your mouth."

"....."

There was no response. It seemed like she was sleeping deeply.

Time to try again. This time, I'll be a bit louder.

"Um, excuse me! Drool's hanging from your mouth!"

Twitching this time, she quickly got up.

As she was getting up, she pulled out a handkerchief that looked like it was prepared in advance (it seemed like something like this has happened to her before) and wiped her drool off her face. She then turned her face towards me, blinking as she double-checked her surroundings.

After all that, while she was still blinking at me, she opened her mouth to speak as if she suddenly remembered something.

"...Oh? Has my alarm rung, or have I become an Amura?¹⁸"

"I totally understand why you would say the former, but the latter? What kind of dreams are you having!?"

All of a sudden, she said something silly. I couldn't help but retort.

I have a quick wit, if I may say so myself. A salute to my straight man spirit.

"...What, so it wasn't my alarm. Well then... Zzz..."

"No wait, please wait a minute! Please don't fall asleep again now that you're relieved!"

"Hehe, there's no need to worry. I was merely saying "zzz"."

"You were saying it!? Why would you say something like that in the middle of the conversation!?"

"Hehe, it was a joke. Yeah... thank you very much for waking me up. So, you are? And, what is it that you want from me?"

She was pretty much doing things at her own pace.

What's up with her? Who is this person...!?

As she stretched her body, she stared at the three of us, alternating her gaze between us one at a time.

"Err... I'm Togashi Yuuta. Umm, and you are?"

I got so swept up by her pace that I ended up giving my normal self-introduction.

¹⁸ This sentence is an untranslatable pun. "watashi no arāmu natta" (わたしのアラーム鳴った), or "has my alarm rung", was 'repeated' again by Kumin, "watashi, amurā ni natta" (わたし、アムラーになった), or "have I become an Amura". An "Amura" is a term for young girls who imitate the dressing style of Namie Amuro, a longstanding J-Pop artist.

Her power to set the pace was terrifying.

“Ah, so you’re Yuuta-kun. So Yuu-chan then. Nice to meet you, and please treat me well~.”

...She instantly decided on calling me by the same nickname that Amaniji-senpai gave to me.

But, then again, it’s not like it’s a bad nickname.

And, from the way you’ve phrased it, it seems like you know of me?

Still, I’m a bit hurt that you didn’t answer my question...

“And you two are?”

Slanting her head, she shifted her gaze behind me.

Her voice seemed to be directed at Rikka and Shichimiya, who were standing in front of the door peeping at the situation.

Shichimiya was the first to step up in response to those words.

She moved to the left of me.

“Nice to meet you, I’m Shichimiya Satone. However, that’s just an alias – my true name is Sofia Ring –”

“So Satone-chan then! Nice to meet you, and please treat me well~.”

It was interrupted.

The battle of an airhead’s pace VS resisting being swept up by her pace has ended in Shichimiya’s defeat!

It seems that this girl may be quite skilled. Even Shichimiya was stupefied by the sudden interruption.

At last, it was now Rikka’s turn. However, Rikka stayed hidden behind Shichimiya and me as she introduced herself.

“I’m Takanashi Rikka. Please treat me well.”

Bowing her head, it looks like she more or less managed to introduce herself properly.

Looking earnestly through the gap between Shichimiya and me, the girl gave Rikka a child-soothing smile,

“So you’re Rikka-chan! Please treat me well~.”

and said that as she, while seated, politely bowed her head.

Then, after raising her head, she once again gave a sweet smile.

“Me, I’m a second year, Tsuyuri Kumin. And I’m a member of the drama club – ah, no, that’s not quite right. I’m a member of the Eccentric Drama Club, so please treat me well!”

Tsuyuri Kumin-senpai spoke with a relaxed tone.

You could feel that her tempo was oozing out of her from various places. In addition, like I expected, it seems that she was a club member.

Nevertheless, her name’s Tsuyuri? As a surname, Tsuyuri definitely makes the list of rare names.

Is our school a treasury of rare names or something?

Or, was our principal admitting people into the school based on names taken from the entrance exams and interviews... It’s troubling how plain my name was around here.

“Eh? No response? That’s going to make me cry...”

With her head tilted in puzzlement, which definitely wasn’t giving off the impression of being on the verge of tears at all, was Tsuyuri Kumin-senpai.

Turning my gaze towards Shichimiya, it seemed that she was feeling sad from being cut off before, as her face was downcast and was teary-eyed. Poor Shichimiya...

Rikka was invoking her ‘shyness’ skill once again, releasing her aura from behind me with no consideration of me at all.

It appears that I was the only one who could reply.

“Ah, err, same here, please treat us well too. Um, we were told to come here by Amaniji-senpai. Do you know where she is?”

“Since it’s Hideri-chan, she should be arriving shortly? Yeah, that’s right, Hideri-chan did tell me about you guys! She was talking about how great things were since an amazing person was joining us. Right, right, just like the rumours say, to me Satone-chan definitely does seem amazing!”

“Eh, me!? Nyahaha, I mean, I’m the Magical Demon Duchess after all!”

Although she was astonished by the sudden turn of events, Shichimiya had a look of relief on her face, as she was finally able to give her usual speech about her character’s setting.

In addition, as a result of being praised so suddenly, she was laughing to hide her embarrassment.

It seemed that she had bounced back from being depressed and was, above all, happy.

“Eh, that’s amazing! Since you’re a demon duchess, does that mean you live in a place like a castle?”

“No no, to be a demon duchess, I cannot live in luxury, so I had the castle sold. Presently, I reside in an apartment.”

“Is that so? What a serious Demon Duchess-san.”

As if it were normal, she agreed with what Shichimiya said.

How shocking. Were you accepting a setting like that as normal!?

Doing things at her own pace... or more precisely, she’s an airhead. On top of that, she seemed like a weird person.

How should I put it – she was weird to the extent that it made sense as to why she was part of the same club as Amaniji-senpai.

When you think about it carefully, Tsuyuri Kumin-senpai was also scouted by Amaniji-senpai, so it was sort of a given that she would be weird.

“Um, Tsuyuri-senpai –”

“Ah, there’s no need to call me Tsuyuri, Kumin is fine. Well, it’s fine if you call me Tsuyuri, but after saying Tsuyuri a lot, wouldn’t the 7th of May¹⁹ be confusing?”

I was cut off by Tsuyuri-senpai – er, Kumin-senpai – to be corrected on how I should be addressing her.

There didn’t seem to be any ill will, but it’s likely that she had either some sort of speech interruption skill or was the type who didn’t really listen to others much.

Then again, just like Kumin-senpai says, repeating Tsuyuri a lot really does seem to erode the date the 7th of May from my mind.

I signalled my understanding with a small nod, before returning to what I was trying to say before.

“Um, in that case, I’ll call you Kumin-senpai then. Well, Kumin-senpai –”

And, as soon as I said that, I heard the door open.

Shifting my attention to the door that was vigorously opened, I saw the person that I had been looking for.

Overwhelmingly rich in colour.

As the others would say, a cluster of aura.

She was so distinct that her existence was radiating with prominence.

The upperclassman, Amaniji Hideri, cheerfully strutted into the office.

“Man, what an ordeal! We met with the student council, but they could only say normal things. Don’t they understand that we can’t do normal – eh!? Yuu-chan’s here!? Oh, and DevTru Rikka-chan too! Thanks SO much for coming!”

¹⁹ Kumin’s surname, 五月七日, can be read either as Tsuyuri (つゆり) or (and much more commonly) 7th of May (ごがつなのか).

Amaniji-senpai was in high spirits after seeing Rikka, but she didn't prostrate this time to greet us.

Although Rikka was hiding behind my back, she couldn't hide herself from Amaniji-senpai as she came from behind me. Still, since it was a normal greeting, it was baffling as to how energetic her greeting was.

"And – are you perhaps the one Yuu-chan talked about, the person who might help?" said Amaniji-senpai, placing her finger on her chin as she stared at Shichimiya closely.

Her stare (or her aura) overwhelmed Shichimiya, causing her to become frozen.

"...No way! There was still someone this outstanding at our school!? Where have you been hiding until now!?"

Shichimiya got praised again.

I'm not sure why, but she was popular.

Well, then again, I brought her along with me since I thought that she was someone who Amaniji-senpai would definitely be pleased with.

Apparently, it seemed that I had brought along the right person. And, as if she was waiting for Amaniji-senpai to say those words, Shichimiya flashed a posed look.

"That's, that's right!" said Shichimiya with a raised voice.

"My dark scarf is charged with magic power – it's glistering with the destructive energy of the Demon Duchess! As you wished, the Magical Demon Duchess, Sofia-chan, is here!"

This was the second time that I'd heard that speech today.

Naturally, her arms were crossed in a daunting pose. She didn't forget to smile and laugh "nyahahahaha" either.

"Yeah, you're definitely great! Thanks for that unique greeting! On top of that, your name's cool as well. Well, in that case, we'll call you Sofia-chan, and you can call us Rainbow Hideri-san!"

"Hmm, no thanks, that sounds terrible☆."

...Unlike Rikka, she outright refused!

She was wearing her usual soft grin, and yet she clearly turned Amaniji-senpai's offer down.

As expected, Amaniji-senpai was devastated.

"DevTru Rikka-chan refused to call me that as well... that name, is... is it really that bad...?"

She was really depressed.

I was tempted to console her over the nickname, since I've also had a similar experience (this too was part of my dark history, so I'm not going to talk about it. Even now, I could still recall how my mother looked at me at that time), but the name was way too eccentric for me to follow-up on.

Plus, I also refuse to call her that.

"Now, now, Hideri-chan, it really is quite a mouthful to say. That's why it's my privilege to call you Rainbow Hideri."

"But if that's the case, then how come we feel like that you've never called us by that name before!?"

"Eh? Ah, it's because the name's really long. That's why I call you Hideri-chan."

"....."

Could it be that Kumin-senpai was actually even more eccentric than Amaniji-senpai...?

"Ha, I guess you can compromise on the nickname like Kumin. However, Sofia-chan, if it's possible, please call us by something that feels daring."

Recovering, Amaniji-senpai had a smile on her face as she said those words flamboyantly.

It made her seem really cute.

"Understood. Let's see... then, how about Hid Eri-san²⁰ –"

"It's daring – or more accurately, you just wanted to cut her name in in name, didn't you!?²¹"

Since the name was so excessively daring, my bad habit accidentally resurfaced again.

Guess there's no longer any doubt as to me being the prince of retorts.

As expected from Yuu-chan!

Then again, if I look at this from another perspective, it could be said that everyone else was playing the funny man... that would be really astonishing!

²⁰ A pun lost in translation. Shichimiya breaks the kanji for Hideri (旱) into Hiboshi (日干).

²¹ Another pun lost in translation. The phrase 思い切った, what I've loosely translated as daring, can be split as 思い[通り] (does things as one wants) and 切った (to cut).

“Really? Well, how about Sun Dried-san²²?”

“The imagery of the rainbow, the thing that definitely shouldn’t be left out, was cut!?”

“In that case, Rainbow-san then.”

“It’s actually daring this time!”

“Jeez, you’re so picky! Fine then, I’ll just call her Hideri-san!”

...It seems that due to me, Amaniji-senpai ended up with a normal nickname.

However, it seemed that seeing our back and forth had placated her, as she didn’t voice a complaint about being given a normal nickname. In addition, her mouth loosened.

“Hahaha, yeah, that’s fine. Since we’ve your upperclassman, we’ll tolerate a being called name like that. Besides, this is the long-awaited meeting after all.”

As she said that, Amaniji-senpai moved towards the centre of the room – in other words, she moved towards what seemed to be for the principal’s private use only, the principal’s desk (I’m not sure if it really is called that).

And, standing in the most prominent place in the room, a place where she could look over everybody – she closed her eyes and vigorously nodded.

“Yeah! Everyone’s here! In that case, let’s start the club activities for the ‘Eccentric Drama Club’ right away!”

It was so sonorous – just like how a real actress would announce it.

She also had a splendid sparkle-like smile.

Just from that expression, I could sense how overjoyed Amaniji-senpai was about being able to perform club activities.

As I turned to my right to look at Rikka, she seemed to be overflowing with motivation, nodding along to Amaniji-senpai’s announcement.

Rikka doesn’t seem like that type of person, but maybe, deep down, she actually longed-for things like club activities.

Rikka has definitely changed from when she had first entered school.

I think she has been changing in various ways ever since we started dating.

As for me – it was the same as well.

²² A third pun lost in translation. This time, Shichimiya adds the first kanji of her surname (天) into the mix, turning the nickname into, as a literal translation, Sun Dried (天日干し). Yuuta then retorts by saying how Shichimiya left out the second part of her surname (虹) which translates as rainbow, which is a word which is almost synonymous with Amaniji (or at least her physical appearance).

Various things have happened since starting school, and she had gained multitude of new experiences, so I'm sure that she has changed quite a bit – naturally, since I'm the one saying it, I think that she has definitely been changing for the better.

In the beginning, she really hated studying for Maths, but now she has improved so much at it that she's now able to avoid a failing grade. On top of that, she used to be the type of person who wouldn't talk to anyone in the class at all, but now she's an active member of the class performance.

Well, she only talks to Kazari-chan, but still.

Even if it's just to Kazari-chan, when you think about it, it still was a really good change.

Rikka's definitely maturing.

Although she was a chuunibyou patient, she was moulding us into her world –

"Yuuta? Wait, sorry, my bad. Yuu-chan, what's wrong?"

"Are you angry!?"

"No, not at all, it was just a joke. I wouldn't get angry over a name like that. It was just that I had felt a really strong gaze from Yuuta."

"You stressed it as if it was some kind of new phrase... never mind. You're a bit excited."

"Yeah, I want to play the leading part!"

...She was way more enthusiastic about this than I imagined.

A short distance to my left, Shichimiya appeared to also suddenly be in high spirits, as she stood imposingly with her arms crossed. Although she was giving off the aura of someone who was playing a leading role, it was pointless since it didn't seem like she was going to be given such a role. After all, she was only here as a helper.

I casually shifted my gaze towards Kumin-senpai's direction – and she was sleeping.

Her sleeping – it felt like that was the thing characterising Kumin-senpai.

As expected of Kumin-senpai. She was really nonsensical.

What kind of play can you perform with a member like that – I'd like to say that I'm excited for the play, but I couldn't help but be anxious.

Chapter 5: Princess☆Ashes

The first thing we did after all the members of the club have gathered was to introduce ourselves once again.

Currently, we were all gathered around the reception table. Four of us were seated on the sofa – Rikka, who was to my left; Shichimiya, who was in front of Rikka; Kumin-senpai (she woke up quickly), who was in front of me; and me.

And, standing in front of the principal's desk, giving off the impression that she was both the president of the club and the chairperson of the meeting, was Amaniji-senpai.

"First things first. Yuu-chan, DevTru Rikka-chan, Sofia-chan – we really appreciate it, for agreeing to helping out with the play. Seriously, thanks so much," said Amaniji-senpai gently as she bowed her head deeply.

Her body was completely perpendicular. From that posture, you could tell that she was being really sincere.

I've already seen it many times before, but it truly was an elegant prayer.

It gave off the impression that she wasn't allowed to raise her head. However, Amaniji-senpai did eventually return her posture back to normal.

Her returning her posture back to normal also felt like a very refined action.

Then, she flashed a smile in our direction.

"And, although it shames us, we don't have anything prepared for the two of you as compensation for helping out. As a result, what we'll do instead for thanks, DevTru Rikka-chan and Sofia-chan, is to do any one thing that you would like for us to do for you. Is that okay?"

"Nyahaha, there's no need for you to thank me at all."

Embarrassed, Shichimiya was waving her hands back and forth to decline Amaniji-senpai's offer.

"Anything?"

In contrast, Rikka replied energetically, sounding out the offer.

As expected, there was no hesitation at all from Rikka when it comes to imposing sudden contracts.

Well, there shouldn't be a problem, since Amaniji-senpai was the one offering.

"Yeah, anything you want! Oh, but the request can't be for anything normal! Let's see, for example... you could ask to become a pâtissier, or something like that!"

...Rather than a request, that's just a dream for the future...

If you were able to make wishes like that come true. then I'd like to become a samurai, or something like that.

Yeah, my way of thinking was a bit chuuni-ish, if I may say so myself.

"Understood – cannot be normal. Thinking."

"Yeah, think about it! Oh, right, if Sofia-chan refrains from requesting anything, then you'll be able to request for three things! For the time being, consider us as the genie of your magic lamp!"

"A lamp's...!? Can you read my mind!?"

"Hehe, yep, we can read it~. You're thinking about... Togashi Yumeha!"

"Don't suddenly pretend to be Akinator²³!"

Moreover, how did you know what my sister's full name was!? There definitely wasn't a reason for Amaniji-senpai to know her full name...

Is she the real Akinator!?

"Well, for whatever it is that the three of you have decided on, leave it to us! Now that that's settled, it's time for us to hand over the script for the play!"

It seemed that Amaniji-senpai had prepared the scripts well in advance, as the three of us each had a script to ourselves.

Kumin-senpai also seemed to have her own script as well, as she pulled a copy of it out from her bag.

Moving my gaze towards the title of the script that was given to me, I saw the words 'Princess☆Ashes' printed in a sans-serif typeface.

When I turned the cover page over, the role list for this play was printed.

The number of roles – there were exactly 5.

In the space next to leading role, 'Cinderella', to show who was casted – it was blank.

Blank – or to be more precise, it was erased.

It seemed like a correction pen was used to erase what used to be there.

The next entries on the list were 'Prince', 'Lord of Witches', 'Emperor', and 'Queen'.

Like with the main role, there were traces of correction fluid in the space where the cast member's name was supposed to be.

...This script, weren't there way too many things for me to retort about?

²³ A 'Web Genie' based on the game Twenty Questions.

Princess Ashes – I assumed that we were doing *Cinderella*, since Cinderella translated into Japanese was ‘Ash Covered Princess’, but aside from the leading role the play was nothing like *Cinderella* at all.

More precisely, the only common elements were the royals!

Briefly skimming over the script, it seemed that there were seven lithographs to collect, and that instead of a ball, there was a martial arts tournament to attend... Crap, the script’s so weird that I’ve started sweating.

“Hmm, the leading role is super cool!”

“Nyahaha, the ‘Lord of Witches’ role seems to suit me well!”

“Rikka-chan and Satone-chan seem to be fine playing any role, so there might not be a need for me to have any screen time~.”

Unlike me, Rikka and Shichimiya seemed to enjoy how nonsensical the script was. In addition, for some reason, Kumin-senpai also joined in on their conversation. It seems that the three of them were getting along well...

After seeing our reactions, Amaniji-senpai told us the name of the story that the script was based on.

“Right, so; but we’re sure you have already figured it out after looking at the script. That’s right, it’s *Cinderella*.”

“No no, what part of this is Cinderella-like!?”

“We’ll be charging you for that ordinary response. Charging. Cash.”

“You’re pressing me for money!?”

“Still, Yuu-chan’s right. We’ve added quite a bit to the original story, since doing a ‘standard’ version of *Cinderella* would be way too boring!”

“.....” “.....” “.....”

Nobody retorted – normally I’d be raising one, but it seems that I’ve been prohibited from voicing any.

In addition, there’s also a fee to retort now.

“We-well then! First of all, let’s start with the casting; if no one has any particular role in mind, then are you guys fine with letting us decide?”

Shifting her gaze away from us, Amaniji-senpai asked for our approval.

There didn’t seem to be any objections from Rikka and Shichimiya – rather, they seemed to be nodding along in agreement.

I mean, it’s not like I had any objections to Amaniji-senpai deciding on the cast either, so I also nodded along in agreement.

“Thanks for agreeing, everyone! We really didn’t expect my request to go that smoothly. Having no objections sometimes can be nice. In that case, for the role of Cinderella – DevTru Rikka-chan, play that role for me please!”

Amaniji-senpai pointed her hand towards Rikka.

I was struck by how charming she looked with her palm intentionally upturned, but –

“Um, normally, shouldn’t Amaniji-senpai or Kumin-senpai be taking the leading role...?”

I was a bit reserved in voicing my objection to how extremely unexpected the casting was.

I thought that I wouldn’t have any objections, but it seemed that I was just being swayed along by the mood. I mean, wasn’t this going to be their last play...?

“It’s fine, it’s fine! Doing things like this makes it even less normal, so it’s fine. Besides, we were planning on offering DevTru Rikka-chan the lead role anyway, so there’s no problem at all. But with that in mind, we guess you could say that casting her as Cinderella was the normal thing to do. How extremely disappointing.”

“Well... if that’s the only part you are depressed about... what about your thoughts, Rikka?”

It didn’t seem like she had any objections, but all the same I should double-check with her just in case.

“Please leave it to me! Jet Black Cinderella – I recall that she too was once a wielder of the Devilish Truth Stare, so this role is perfect for me.”

“No no! Even if your hand is on your chest and you’re full of self-confidence with your reply, you’re not going to overturn the already established image of Cinderella, okay!?”

“I’m doing no such thing. Jet Black Cinderella is a super strong image.”

“...Sure, that image does feel a bit strong, but: Cinderella never had an image like that!”

Then again, now that you mention it – just by sticking Jet Black to the name, it gave the feeling that she wouldn’t have dropped the glass slipper, nor have been bullied.

In fact, she seemed to be stronger than her older sisters. Then again, there was no “older sister” role in this play.

“Ahaha, so you’re fine with that? Since DevTru Rikka-chan agreed to it as well, then the cast member for Cinderella has been decided on! Good luck!”

Losing interest in my response, Amaniji-senpai announced that the casting for the role had been decided upon.

Well, then again, this was the outcome that both Amaniji-senpai and Rikka wanted, so there isn't anything more for me to say...

More importantly.

Why are situations like these the only time where Rikka's 'shyness' attribute doesn't get invoked – I'm curious.

"Now then, onto the next role! The Lord of Witches! Please play this role, Sofia-chan! Although it's regrettably normal to casting you as the Lord of Witches, you simply fit the image of the role all too perfectly."

"Nyahaha, entrust this to me! I'm the Magical Demon Duchess, or the Demonic Sorceress²⁴ for short! As someone who has surpassed being a mere witch, this role is perfect for me!"

"....."

Although Shichimiya stated, with a self-satisfied smile, that it was a great thing for her to be cast in such a role, with her appearing more lively than usual, it honestly didn't really feel like something all that impressive...

Then again, I wasn't like I had any particular objections here either.

There was nothing for me to criticise, as I too also thought that Shichimiya was perfect for the role.

As for the rest of the roles –

"Then, in that case, we will be playing Emperor and Kumin will be playing the Queen."

"Kaaay. Since my role didn't change, I'm fine with it~."

"Yep, the roles for us two are the same as before! Finally, since Yuu-chan's the only person remaining, he'll be playing as the Prince!"

I had the feeling something like this was going to happen...

Even though I had thought that I was going to be cast as some minor role like the background tree, or something like that.

Although I didn't plan on raising any objections, this was something that I had to contest.

"Um, I'm not sure if I'm suitable for such a prominent role like that... shouldn't you or Kumin-senpai should take this role instead so you can have a more active part in the play...!?"

²⁴ Originally this pun was an abbreviation of Magical Demon Duchess (魔法魔王少女) into 魔々女 (read as 魔魔女), which then plays off the word for witch (魔女). Since there isn't a good direct translation of this pun, I've taken a bit of creative liberty instead.

“No no, Yuu-chan. Rest assured, the Prince role is actually the smallest role in the play.”

“Ah... is that so?”

It seemed that I was the only one who made the mistake of thinking that it was a prominent role.

How embarrassing... My face was bright red!

And then.

“Arc-san! Since the role of ‘Prince’ is normal, I request that we add an additional setting to it called ‘Dark Flame Master’!”

Without warning, Rikka raised her hand up and voiced a completely unrelated proposal.

Although she usually doesn’t do that sort of thing... why now!?

Moverover, even if my role was said to be a minor one, it wasn’t something that should make you so dissatisfied to the point where your checks were swollen... Besides, it would be extremely embarrassing for me if we added that novel setting to my role, as it would essentially expose my past to the entire school...!

All of my nerves were getting frayed...

“Eh!? Nor-normal...? And, well, the, err, Dark Flame Master...? Hmm... well, true, we too did think that the ‘Prince’ role, which was mundanely neither good nor bad, was a bit lacking in terms of character traits, but even so we thought that a prince that was generic, commonplace, and ordinary would be...”

“Isn’t a prince that’s completely generic and ordinary be a bit too unappealing!? Is that even a prince anymore!?”

It seemed that everything normal was crammed into this prince.

“Togashi-kun’s doesn’t have much of a presence, does he?” was what someone had said of the elementary school me!

Those words really depressed me... If I never had heard those shocking words, then perhaps I may have never been inflected with chuunibyou...

“We see, we see... it’s true that there isn’t really a need for the prince to be normal. A prince that appears to be number one in normalness is no good at all! As such, let’s adopt DevTru Rikka-chan’s, the leading actress’, idea!”

“It’s already been decided on!?”

“Yep, it’s been decided. A vote for amusingness! Besides, it’s only the prince role, so whatever,” said Amaniji-senapi as she loosened her expression.

However, it seemed that she wasn't pleased about the change as her tone was a bit sharp – her words made me feel a bit guilty.

"A reluctance to make modifications to the script" was the impression I was getting from her.

"Since there was no time, it was only natural to not want any changes to the final manuscript." With the exception of that, the rest of my feelings of guilt were probably just from me reading into things too much.

That was the sort of half-hearted reply she gave.

"I did it, Yuuta! The Dark Flame Master shall finally descend into the world!"

"...Ah, yes, right."

Next to the delighted Rikka, I was unsure over whether the change was okay.

Since Amaniji-senpai was the one asking us for help, it was possible that she was finding it hard to voice her objections. What should I do?

While I was worrying over what to do alone, Amaniji-senpai began talking once again. This time, her words were so clear that it seemed her sharp tone from before were a lie.

"Right, so now the cast is settled! Now then –"

"Hideri-chan, are you not going to talk about that~?"

The person who reacted to Amaniji-senpai's words was Kumin-senpai.

"Ah, right! Thanks, Kumin!"

As she said that, Amaniji-senpai made a daring smile, and then continued:

"This play, it's going to be performed as a guerrilla play!"

It felt like she was giving off a manga-like "D~ON!!!" expression as she said that.

Her hands were on her hip too.

It was as if she had just announced something important.

"Nonononononononono"

I said "no" so many times that I didn't even know how many times I had said "no".

It was such a bombshell of an announcement that it made me spring up from my seat.

"Isn't something like that prohibited by the school!?"

"Naturally, the student council didn't approve this!"

"Why are you proud about that!?"

"Don't you think that it'd be too boring the play was scheduled in the program as per normal? ...But, well, that's just this upperclassman's opinion."

“Not at all, and I’m sure that the student council will be mad at us about this once they find out...”

“They can be mad then. It’s not like the rules are being ignored. The five of us will just think about how to act in accordance with the rules next time. But, then again, there is no next time.”

“.....”

“‘Within the rules but outside of the norm’, that’s the tagline! What does everyone think?”

In response to Amaniji-senpai’s query, Shichimiya replied with, “The Cultural Festival is a war! Surprise tactics are valid!” Rikka then added, “We need to think of a title for this operation!” Kumin-senpai also chimed in, saying with a gentle smile, “This seems interesting~.”

Aside from me, everyone else was in high spirits.

...Huh, am I the weird one...?

Everyone being unified created such a misapprehension for me.

Without a doubt, surely, probably, I’m the normal one, but...

However, as a result of the flow of events, I had no choice but to be silent.

“In other words, it’s been agreed to! Now, regarding practice, it’ll commence tomorrow. The meeting place will be here in the principal’s office, after school tomorrow, okay? Right, so the first club meeting of the ‘Eccentric Drama Club’ has now come to a close. Good work today! Look over the script when you get home, alright?”

As she announced the end of the meeting, Amaniji-senpai slapped her hands together to signal our dissolution.



We parted ways with our upperclassmen at the principal’s office, and we returned to the fourth floor, where the first-year classrooms are – we were in front of the homeroom for class 1-2.

Since I only planned on telling Amaniji-senpai that we could help out, I left my bag in the classroom, and so we had to return so I could pick it up.

Since our meeting finished so soon, we had quite a bit of time before school closed for the today.

It seemed that all the classes were preparing for the cultural festival, as all the first-year classrooms looked quite busy.

The voices of people practicing either a song or a play.

The light-hearted chat between people preparing for their class’ program.

Those sounds were flying at me from all directions.

My classroom was busy as well – the boys were hard at work preparing the stage for the dance.

Seeing how the girls were absent, it was likely that they have borrowed another larger classroom somewhere else for practice.

“Rikka, what are you going to do? Are you going to go to the dance rehearsals?”

“Yeah, I am. Although my dance is perfect, I’ll go since everyone else is working so hard.”

Ooooh. Such were the words from Rikka’s mouth.

It’s surprising to say that it was surprising, but for her to be able to say those unexpected words.

Rikka’s also diligently participating – she’s changing.

“I see. In that case, work hard! Shichimiya, what are you going to do?”

“Hm? I don’t really have anything planned for today – ah, since I’m free, maybe I’ll go tag along with Rikka-chan. I want to go play with Mori-sama!” said Shichimiya while smiling.

It was a mischievous kind of smile.

“She’ll be angry if you disturb her too much, so please keep it in moderation...”

“Oh, Hero, I wouldn’t do something like that. I won’t be a nuisance – I’m simply going to dance along with her! By the way, Hero, what are you going to do?”

“I’m –”

Although it would have been better for me to remain in the classroom and help in preparing the stage for the dance, I was a bit worried.

The source of my worries – that sharp negative tone from before.

In addition, there was also the matter about the guerrilla nature of our play. Personally, I didn’t think it was good for us to trouble others like this, and it seemed that now would be the only time for me to prevent it from happening.

There was without a doubt some merit in talking about it once, at the very least.

“Hmm... let’s see. Just then, Amaniji-senpai was thinking about adding the ‘Dark Flame Master’ setting into the play, but in the end, it’s still my role... so I guess I’ll head back and talk with her about it a bit more.”

“Nyahaha, that’s right, it’s Hero’s original form after all. It has to be explained properly, right?”

“Indeed, it needs to be reported as soon as possible.”

“Oh. In that case, let me know when you two are done. We’ll go home together.”

Then –

After parting ways with Rikka and Shichimiya, I was back in the principal’s office.

Not even 10 minutes had passed since I was last here, as we had only recently parted ways from here. Even so, there was still the chance that Amaniji-senpai had already left for home.

And, as I started thinking about heading back to the classroom to lend a hand in preparing the stage for the dance, I once again knocked on the door of the principal’s office and entered quietly.

“Huh, Yuu-chan, what’s the matter? Forgot something?”

“Wait, why are you sitting over there as if it was the natural thing to do...!?”

Sitting imposingly in the chair that seemed to be for the principal’s exclusive use was Amanij-senpai, who, upon seeing my face when I entered the room, looked a bit surprised.

I’m the one who should be surprised here.

“...Ah, umm, rather than something I’ve forget, it’s more like there’s something I’m a bit concerned about. Err... where’s Kumin-senpai?”

“Something you’re concerned about? As for Kumin, she’s already gone home to sleep. Did you need her for something?”

“No, that’s not the case. You’re the one that I have some business with. Is now fine?”

“With us? Yeah, now’s fine. We were only just adjusting the script a bit. Take a seat, Yuu-chan.”

Getting up from the chair, Amaniji-senpai moved to the sofa near the reception table.

As she moved, she pulled out two cups and a teapot from somewhere out that appeared to be the principal’s desk and carried them over.

...The principal’s desk contained another dimension.

Furthermore, it seemed that said dimension was cold.

Although I was curious about the desk’s structure, I too took a sit on the sofa, sitting in such a way that I was face-to-face with Amaniji-senpai.

“Once more, we’d like to say our thanks to you, Yuu-chan. Okay?” said Amaniji-senpai delightfully as she poured tea into the cups for the two of us.

“DevTru Rikka-chan and Sofia-chan – for bringing those two wonderful girls here, seriously, thanks so much. Of course, we’re also thankful to you for agreeing to help out as well.”

As she said that with a friendly smile, she placed one of the cups of tea in front of me.

“Rather than thanking me, please go and thank the people themselves. As for me, I’m more like a freebie thrown in with Rikka.”

“Yeah, we were thinking of giving our thanks to those two once again. Nevertheless, the fact that everyone was willing to help someone as eccentric as us makes us really happy.”

“Even you think of yourself as eccentric...”

Well, rather than eccentric, I get the impression that it’d be more accurate to call you a reckless person.

“Ahahaha, but, well, it’s not like this eccentricity is just for show,” stressed Amaniji-senpai, earnestly.

For me, those words felt very worrying – it may have been due to the fact that everything that isn’t “normal” appealed to Amaniji-senpai, but even so, her words felt rather dark.

Rather than dark, perhaps I should be saying that there was something hidden within her words.

That her words hid another meaning.

As such – I was worried.

“.....”

I hesitated for a moment over whether it was appropriate for me to continue on with the conversation.

However, that hesitation was overwhelmed by my strong feeling of anxiety.

I’ll keep listening – if it were the case that it was something she didn’t want to talk about, it would be fine for us to just leave things at that. As such, I decided to continue on with the conversation for just a bit longer.

“...Amaniji-senpai, have you always been like this?”

“Hm? Always?”

“Umm, like from when you were small... I get the impression that you’ve always been an eccentric person.”

“Yep! That’s right!”

She answered me extremely casually.

Maybe that feeling from before was just my imagination...

“Well, various things did happen though,” said Amaniji-senpai as she lowered her gaze. She kept her eyes averted for a while.

This time, those words – it wasn't just my imagination, there definitely was something hidden within those words.

"Was it not the same for you, Yuu-chan?"

Amaniji-senpai turned to me with a face that was that was completely lacking in vigour.

Her words sounded frail.

"What do you mean by that?"

"The desire to be more special than anyone else."

"The desire to be special..."

"Ah, was this the thing that Yuu-chan was talking about, the thing that you're worrying about?"

"Er, well..."

Uhh... I was at a loss as to what to say.

I didn't know where to place my gaze, as I wasn't sure how I should reply, and so I defaulted to hanging my head.

To be honest, I was planning on talking about something else. Then again, I was very curious about Amaniji-senpai's personality. Rather, perhaps it'd be more accurate to say that it had been on my mind for a while now.

The uniquely distinctive rainbow upperclassman – how she became like this, her circumstances.

On the topic of her personality, it also seemed to remind me of that.

I wonder if Amaniji-senpai was also ill with it as well – or something similar.

Still, as expected, "Amaniji-senpai seems a bit chuunibyou-ish!" was not something that I could say to her.

"Ahaha, but it's not a very pleasant story though. See, it's not a story we're sure you'd be interested in, since it's the sort that people don't know how to react to."

"Wow... I wasn't expecting that the reason behind that desire was due to that sort of thing, but..."

"Hehe, aren't you kind, Yuu-chan? Still, if Yuu-chan's curious, we'll talk about it. Since Yuu-chan will most likely be listening seriously to my story."

"....."

"We're sure that you'll believe our story. Despite the fact that the two of us have only been acquainted for a short period of time. You're the strange boy who didn't mind our trespassing of your room after all."

“No, that’s...”

“To be honest, we’ve been pleased with you ever since that time, Yuu-chan. Ordinary people won’t even hear us out. Moreover, you’re listening to our weird story even now.”

“...When you put things like that, on the contrary it makes it harder for me to ask you about it.”

“Really? In that case, we’ll willingly tell you about it!”

“You’re weird enough to be an Amanojaku²⁵, seriously!”

Honestly, I’m not sure if she was hard or easy to deal with.

On one hand, she had declared that she couldn’t do anything normally. On the other, it was admirable how frank she was in carrying out her words.

Still, in that sense – she was exactly as expected.

“Nevertheless, it’s a bit hard to talk about that here... it seems that the principal is about to return as well, so how about the two of us change locations?”



Following our conversation, I was brought to Amaniji-senpai’s room.

Her room – it wasn’t some sort of special room that was within the school grounds. Rather, as per normal expectations, it was a room outside of the school campus; a room that was part of her lodgings.

However, it was only a three-minute walk away from the school gates.

She lived a section of the third storey of a low-rise condo located behind the school. I didn’t really associate it as being outside school grounds, since in my head the image of being outside the school grounds was linked with the need to commute very far.

It was shorter to walk from the school to here than to walk from one end of the school to the other.

Furthermore, if you left from the back gate, commuting wouldn’t even take a minute, making this an ideal place for going to school in the morning.

To think that she was able to prostrate herself in a place that’s essentially her neighbourhood: the strength of her mind is astonishing. Naturally, I mean that in as a compliment.

Amaniji-senpai’s home, unlike Rikka’s apartment, looked very lived-in.

²⁵ An Amanojaku (天邪鬼, ‘heavenly evil spirit’) is a youkai who is able to provoke a person’s darkest desires and tempt them to act on their wicked impulses.

There were flowers (I have no idea what type of flowers they were) in a vase on top of the shoe shelf in the entryway, and the hallway was clean to the point where it seemed that someone had just swept it.

It was strange as to why the living room gave off the impression of a mother saying “welcome home” as it was just the two of us in the condo. It seemed that everyone else who livie here was presently out working.

Following Amaniji-senpai’s lead, I entered her room.

It wasn’t like I had a hobby of evaluating other people’s rooms, but if I had to give my opinion of her room – bland.

It was a clean and tidy room.

Since it was this strange upperclassman, I was under the impression that her room would be some strange jack-in-the-box, so I was disappointed by, what I guess you could call, her unexpected room.

However, there were a lot of rainbowed-coloured trinkets in her traditional Japanese tatami mat room, which did feel strange.

On the topic of strange things that I’ve noticed, how many pictures of rainbows did she have decorating her room? Also catching my eye was the book with the rainbow-coloured book cover on her bookshelf.

I mean, what can I say, I really love rainbows – that was what her room was telling me.

“What are your thoughts on the room?”

“Eh?”

Since it was such an abrupt question by Amaniji-senpai, I was rather discourteous and had her ask the question again. However, it seemed that Amaniji-senpai didn’t particularly mind as she asked the question again.

“Our room, what’s Yuu-chan’s impression of it?”

“Err... Let’s see, it’s unexpectedly normal?”

Even though I was the one who said it, but unexpectedly normal? Why did I say that?

Unexpectedly normal – that phrase contained a word that didn’t apply to Amaniji-senpai, a word that the differently didn’t fit.

Although the word ‘unexpectedly’ is a compliment for Amaniji-senpai, its connotation probably changed since it was attached to “normal”.

“Yeah, it’s surprisingly normal, right?”

Amanji-senpai appeared satisfied with my reply.

“We’re just, unfortunately, an unexpectedly normal person.”

"That's not true, I've seen just how eccentric you are. It's a bit unreasonable and unjustified to conclude that you're not just based your room..."

"Ahaha, that certainly may be true. However, in our opinion, a person's room is reflective of who they are, and taking a peek into another person's room is the single best way of understanding their true personality. Their bookshelf, their clothes, their accessories: wouldn't you say that they give a good outline of what the person likes? It's both beautiful and dirty. You can also generally tell when a room's hiding a secret as well."

"I see..."

"We were going to keep silent, but to be frank, when we were in observing your room Yuu-chan, we were also trying to find the true self that you've hidden – not!"

"Now, now, for the time being, take a seat, kay?" said Amaniji-senpai as she took a cushion out for herself to sit on. I too also borrowed a cushion and sat down.

"Moving to a simple place like this: well, this was the reason why."

"You mean you wanted for me to see this room?"

"That's right. It was easier if you saw it. Our – or as you would say, the "true nature of this unexpectedly normal person". And, emphasis on the word 'normal'."

The word that Amaniji-senpai made sure to emphasise shocked me.

Somehow, my impression of her was of a person who would never say words like that in earnest.

It was surprising, among other things, that she'd call herself normal; it was so strange to the point that it felt abnormal. It was a word that differently didn't fit Amaniji-senpai.

The shock to me was so big that I couldn't even respond. A short period of silence followed.

But then, as if to break that silence,

"We want to ask you a little something... Yuu-chan, you said that you're "normal", right?" said Amaniji senpai.



"It's better if you didn't say those words. To not say things like, "you're normal". In our opinion, see, it's not a word that's very positive.

"That's right, words like 'normal', generally, aren't compliments at all. Even so, it seemed that we were normal. Normal: to phrase it in another way, 'not special'.

"Viewing us from afar, we were someone who wasn't special at all, someone who had no personality whatsoever: we were simply Girl A.

"Aha, that's a fierce retort from you, Yuu-chan. However, Yuu-chan, haven't you also thought of yourself like that before?

“That you were someone who was ‘more special than anyone else’.

“Was it the same for Yuu-chan as well? We see. You understand what we’re talking about.

“Still, it was different for us. Although we did think all that of myself – we didn’t have anything that we could call special, and from a distance we could only be seen as someone who was personality-less. We were the very essence of ‘normal’.

“That’s not the case? Ahaha, thanks. That may be the case now. Yeah – only now.

“In the beginning, we wanted to be “a special person” in a much simpler way. We just wanted to be thought of as special.

“By our parents.

“Don’t make such a gloomy face. It’s not that big of a story. It’s pretty common. It’s just the story of our father’s affair.

“Eh? It’s not a common story?

“We-well, that’s just how it was to us. At the time, we thought it was pretty common. Our father left us, so we thought that us and our mother weren’t someone special to our father.

“Now that we think about it – this story of ours. You could say that it’s the cause of making us the person we are today.

“We were wrong as a kid, thinking that we didn’t have anything special. We may have thought like that at that time due to viewing ourself as someone who wasn’t special.

“Then again, even if someone like that didn’t happen, we’re certain that we would have eventually ended up being the same eccentric person that we are today.

“Wouldn’t you agree? We mean, it’s us after all, right?

“Ahaha. Anyway, so – from that day onwards, we tried to become someone special.

“After deciding that, we thought to ourself: what did it mean to be someone special? The result – we had to be someone who was absolutely different from every other person.

“To live as a special and unique person.

“However, we were told something. Right after our parents divorced. Back when we were in the first year of middle school. By my teacher. On that day – during the parent-teacher interview for course guidance.

“Amaniji-san’s ‘normal’.

“Those words by my teacher were probably meant as a compliment. That we were a normal and good child. It was probably supposed to mean something like that.

“What do you think, Yuu-chan?

"Is that so? Japanese is quite hard, isn't it? Or are we just weird?"

"Hehe, right? Yay!"

"We weren't happy to be praised like that. Yeah, even if it was meant to be a compliment. At that time, our mother didn't say anything. Maybe our mother knew how we saw those words. Maybe she didn't. We don't know."

"Either way, we didn't think of it as a compliment. We thought that it was normal to not be told stuff like "she is normal". And, back then, we were wondering why we were told something like that."

"At first, we didn't understand its significance. But then, immediately understood. That I was a worthless human being with no personality. That I was a normal child who wasn't special. That it was something bad."

"Your words are so kind, Yuu-chan."

"However, back then, there wasn't anybody who tell us the things you're saying now, Yuu-chan."

"Mother didn't say anything either – that was the major turning point for us."

"As such, from that point onwards we came to think, "normal is no good". Being part of the masses means not being special. And so – we became a special person."

"Well, that's just how it is. And now, like how Yuu-chan puts it, our identity has now become like this."

"Yeah, that's why we made our personality like this. There's no one else like us."

"But, there's no one else that thinks like us, right? There's no one else who wants to be special like this."

"Ahaha, right. That's true. Everyone's like this at least once. Thank goodness."

"But you know, we may have made a mistake back then. Or rather, we made a misinterpretation."

"Yep, that's right. To put it simply, the antonym of 'special' isn't 'normal'."

"The antonym of 'normal' is 'abnormal'."

"For the young us, by the time we realised our mistake, we found ourselves already in solitude."

"That child's weird' was what others would say of us."

"Or in other words, abnormal... Yep, we became a 'heretic'."

"That's right, we were already past the stage of "normal is no good".

"Hehe, but then in that sense we were already kind of unique, weren't we?"

“And so, from that point onwards, we’ve been the way we are this whole time. Even so, we had tried to push ourselves even further. Because we were special.

“Yeah, but from our point of view, we weren’t afraid of being misunderstood as a ‘heretic’. The past us would have been pleased with the current us.

“Even if everyone around us was judging us, we wanted to be ‘special’.

“For example, we did things like this.

“Ahaha, isn’t it amazing? Nobody else is ever going to do things like getting seventy-seven points on every test! Even now, we’re a bit prideful of this! By the way, it’s still a work-in-progress.

“Subjects like Japanese are quite difficult, right? When it’s an essay, there’s no chance at winning. We score 0 points on those.

“Grrr! We’re not an idiot!

“Ah... Yeah, in our case, we were treated as if we were some sort of tumour. It was like they too would get infected if they got too close. Aside from that, it was great for us back then.

“Back then, we experienced what it was like to be a special person – since we were always alone.

“Eh, no way!?”

“We-well, let us finish this funny old tale of ours. Even though it’s probably not that particularly funny. No, although it was probably a tale of mistakes, we have no regrets about it. Even now, we didn’t think that our past was bad.

“And then, when we entered high school, we had an encounter. That’s how we became the final form of us, the present us.

“Yep, that’s right. It was the Eccentric Drama Club.”



I – even though it was Amaniji-senpai’s story, for some reason I felt that I could relate.

How do I put it; it was similar to my past.

It wasn’t to the same degree, but I too had thought that I was an amazingly special person. I was certain of it.

And so, I was ill.

Ill with chuunibyou.

After listening to Amaniji-senpai’s story, it seemed that she too was also a sufferer or sympathiser.

Still, given how far she took it, I'm doubtful as to whether she could be categorised as having chuunibyou. Then again, only someone with chuunibyou could take it as far as she does.

She was as devoted to it as Rikka, and as ultimate of a patient as Shichimiya.

To be frank, I think that she's amazing.

Normally, you wouldn't be able to take it this far.

The reason I know all this is because I too once shared the same view as Amaniji-senpai. However, in the end, I concluded: "Oh. I'm not special."

Thinking back to it, I despaired a bit as I realised it.

Even though I believed that I was completely different from everyone else, I was thinking of and doing the same things as everyone else. And thus, upon realising this, I graduated from chuunibyou.

Unlike me though – Amaniji-senpai persisted.

Even now, she continues to persist.

It isn't easy to be special.

It isn't easy to keep being special.

And so, to be frank –

"You're amazing."

Such were the words that came out.

"Huh? Amazing?"

"Well, as expected, Amaniji-senpai's not normal at all."

Given the situation, those words (which were intended to be a compliment) could have been interpreted differently. However, it seemed that Amaniji-senpai understood my intentions, as she let out a "hehe" with a smile.

"Is that so? How joyous. Even if it's just a little, it's great how you sympathise with us. Normally, no one sympathises with us. Maybe you understand us, Yuu-chan, since you're looking at things in third person – or something like that."

"...Personally, I don't think that's the case. Surely, anyone –"

"Hehe, Yuu-chan really is kind. However, reality's a little harsher than that. A heretic's a villain simply because they are a heretic. Even if they didn't do anything wrong. Ah, but it was bad of us to trespass."

"...Right. In that the case, I'll do what's normal to do and report that intrusion of yours."

“But! There was a legitimate reason for doing so! To meet with Yuu-chan! Meeting Yuu-chan can’t be done via normal means!”

“If such a method of entering was acceptable, there would be thieves in my room all the time!”

“Ooh, we see! Next time, we’ll make an appointment to enter from there!”

“That still against the law!”

“Is that so... Even so, we won’t give up. Something like giving up’s too normal.”

“Are you just trying to sound cool with that pointless remark!?”

“No – we sincerely are sorry about what happened back then. Next time, we’ll do our best to avoid violating the increasingly aggressive law!”

“Ah... normally you apologise...”

“Hehe, normally!? Oh, oh, so we’ve prostrating!”

“In this situation, prostrating does feel like the normal thing to do...”

“Eh!? Un, understood! Prostrating it is!”

“Did prostrating’s normalness pass away²⁶!?”

It’d be troubling if it became a star.

Furthermore, it’d be a terrible constellation.

I have absolutely no idea how I ended up on this line of thought.

Let’s see... That’s right, there was something I wanted to ask about.

“By the way, there’s something that I’m a little curious about – why do you refer to yourself with the royal ‘we’? Why do you keep using such a unique way of addressing yourself? Is the reason why related to the story from before as well?”

For now, before moving to the main issue at hand, I asked about this as a preface.

I had been a little curious about it ever since we first met.

Was it because of something that happened back then, or was it because of it being novel? Why did she decide to refer to herself like in third person?

“Ah, correct! Hehe, it’s cool, isn’t it, right? Since it’s normal to refer to yourself in first person, we thought that it was necessary to do something more original!”

²⁶ A pun on the Japanese euphemism to die. The original Japanese text, なくなった (nakunatta), usually means “to lose/disappear/be consumed”, but can also mean “to die”. This is then linked to the idea of becoming a star, the Japanese euphemism of dying.

With her chest puffed out, Amaniji-senpai had a beautiful smile on her face as she replied to me.

Well, I understand why she's so pleased, as I too also thought that it was Amaniji-senpai-like.

"Haha, that's very Amaniji-senpai-like. Still, to be frank, it doesn't seem like a thing that you should be fussed over."

"It is worth fussing over. We must always be unique! At first, we contemplated using "nou", but we stopped since no one else understood what we meant."

“^{nou} のう'...”

“Yeah, ^{nou} 儂²⁷.”

"It's was a mispronunciation!?"

I mean, I sort of get it. Both "washi" and "nou" have an archaic ring when you say it. In addition, "nou" certainly is quite original... it might even be more novel than saying washi.

Still, it didn't change the fact it was wrong.

Regardless, there was still something more important that I had yet to properly ask about.

"Umm, one more thing. Why is the clubroom the principal's office?"

Once again, I asked about something inconsequential.

Since I was thinking about unrelated things, I ended up unconsciously asking about something pointless...

Then again, that question of mine was probably inevitable, since it was something that I had also been very curious about.

"Guess Yuu-chan really is a strange person after all. What a high-level question."

"You mean up till now it hadn't been high-levelled!?"

"Well, yeah. That's what we said. As for the clubroom being the principal's office, it's because the principal's the club advisor. We've sorry that we couldn't betray your expectations."

"Even if I did expect it, I still would have been shocked!"

Our advisor's the principal! Our advisor's the principal!

²⁷ The kanji (儂; the personal pronoun used generally by the elderly) is usually pronounced as わし (washi), but can also be pronounced as のう (nou).

And that's why we're in the principal's office! And that's why we're in the principal's office!

I was so surprised that I retorted twice in my mind. Seriously, anything could happen at this school.

"Really? If you say so. Still, it makes us pleased. It's complicated, but long story short, the principal is looking after us now."

An embarrassed "Ahaha" leaked out from of Amaniji-senpai's dry smile.

"The principal made various arrangements for us to attend. Seriously, it was great that the principal was so rich in personality. You know, if it wasn't for the principal, we definitely wouldn't have chosen to enrol at this school. Even the fact the school was right next to this place wouldn't have swayed us!"

"....."

On the contrary, I've heard that some people, after having met the principal, decided against enrolling here.

But, well, I could sort of get where Amaniji-senpai was coming from, since I too was swayed by school's ethos of freedom (or excessive freedom).

Now, however – it was time to raise that.

For some reason there always seemed to be some sort of complicated question on my mind. I must have some sort of anxiety disorder, for me to be this prone to worrying... To be honest, that might actually be the case, but even so I'm still concerned about it.

Concerned about the main issue, the thing I really need to ask about – the thing I've yet to ask about properly.

"Um, to be honest, there's one more thing that I'd like to ask about. Is that okay?"

"Ah, is that so? It's not like we particularly mind how many questions there are: go ahead."

Since I didn't want the mood too heavy, I chose my words as carefully as possible.

"It's about the script; I'm a bit concerned about it. Although Rikka had said to change the script with a bang, it'd be perfectly fine if you disregarded her. After all, you seem to have your circumstances. To tell you the truth, telling you this was the reason why I returned."

"....."

Silence.

I had tried to avoid setting a heavy mood, but it seems that things didn't go over smoothly...

After about five seconds of silence, Amaniji-senpai made a wry smile.

“Ahaha, so that’s what was on your mind? Sorry, that’s not we meant at all, see... No, yeah, that was a lie. It was true that we were unsure of what to do about it. But it’s fine now. We’re incorporating DevTru Rikka-chan’s idea! We have to stake everything on the more interesting option!”

“U-umm, if you really do have circumstances, there’s no need for you to overdo things: it’s fine. After all, we shouldn’t be inconveniencing you with this... Besides, Rikka will understand if we tell her that the setting can’t be changed.”

“It’s not troublesome at all, something like this. Rather, we’ve the one who should be sorry for burdening everyone... Hmm, it’s troubling, since our facial expressions can’t capture just how sorry we are. Right then, how would you like for us to commit seppuku²⁸!”

“What kind of idiosyncrasy is that!? Don’t kill yourself off all of a sudden please! Rather, don’t stab your stomach with a mechanical pencil please!”

The heavy mood! In one go, it’s been reset! You’re seriously disgustingly ill!

To suggest seppuku... Ah, persuasion...?

I mistook persuasion for seppuku – how embarrassing.

Even the heavy mood from before was more preferable than this.

But, then again, me making that mistake may have been a good thing, since the mood’s changed for the better.

“But yeah, you’re right. Let us properly explain what the circumstances are surrounding the play. We at least owe you that much, Yuu-chan, given how indebted we are you for helping us out.”

“If it’s something that’s hard for you to talk about, there’s no need for you to...”

“Ahaha, there’s no need to worry. It’s not something that’s hard for us to talk about. Let’s see, where should we start?”

To show that she was thinking, Amaniji-senpai crossed her arms.

“Right – first things first, we should probably start by talking about the script. In regard to changing the script, it’s true that we were a little hesitant... But Yuu-chan, there’s no need for you to worry about that anymore, okay?”

“Yeah, that’s fine.”

Hearing my response, Amaniji-senpai smiled. She then resumed talking again.

“This script – to tell you the truth, we weren’t the sole authors.”

“...Is that so?”

²⁸ This following exchanged is based on a pun between 切腹 (a Japanese suicide ritual to die with honour) and 説伏 (persuasion), as they are both pronounced seppuku (せっぷく).

“Yes, and so for us to just arbitrarily change the script – that was what crossed our minds. It was a collaborative effort to come up with the scenes of the script. And so, the scenes – wouldn’t the scenes be special to its other author?”

“...Yeah, I guess.”

“We want to cherish special things. And hence we were a little hesitant. Ahh, what would be the right thing to do?”

“.....”

“Still, we, without a doubt, want for things to go in an interesting direction. That feeling was, and still is, true. So that’s why, without deleting or altering the existing scenes – we will add. Since it’s special to that person, it’s impossible for us to do something like deleting a scene, and so the only way to make things more interesting is to add new scenes. That’s why, Yuu-chan – it’s all fine, there’s no need to worry.”

“Umm... about the script, who was its other author?”

“My upperclassman. Who has already graduated –”

Once again, Amaniji-senpai swallowed her words.

As if to signify her indecision, her eyes were closed.

However, she then opened her eyes slowly, and –

“But now... Senpai’s no longer here anymore.”

– were the words she said as she bit her lip.

The significance of those words –

Although her words were ambiguous, it was still possible tell that something had happened.

...Whatever it was that had happened in the past – it was probably something sad...

It was probably the reason why she had been this desperate to perform the play... It also explained both her fervour to perform the play when we first met, and her feelings of unease she constantly had in regard to the script. It was why she was abrupt, and, above all, in a hurry.

I couldn’t find them – the right words to respond to her.

Unintentionally, however, my face told a different story.

It clearly leaked how I felt.

“Ahaha, it’s pointless to worry about it, Yuu-chan. ...It’s something inevitable after all.”

“...I’m sorry. But, even so –”

Although I managed to choke out a reply, I wasn't able to stop my voice from quivering.

Concerned by my response, Amaniji-senpai made an effort to be cheerful.

"It's fine it's fine! Senpai – Catgirl-senpai, as you could probably tell from her nickname, was a very strange person. She was the personification of interestingness."

Choosing her words carefully, Amaniji-senpai continued.

"She truly was a great upperclassman. It's no exaggeration to say that the reason why we haven't changed much at all during high school was because of our meeting with Catgirl-senpai."

"....."

"We liked her so much that we proposed to her."

"You're exaggerating, right!?"

"That's right! The problem past."

...That response had a troubling twist.

It's double meaning. Did she mean a problem from the past, or that the past itself was the problem?

"Well, although I've been joking about it – she really did save us back then. To someone like us, she was kind. In fact, she drowned us joy. It was the first time someone treated us like that. And that's why we proposed to her."

"...What was the joke from before then...?"

"Haha, we were joking about the marriage. It was a trial from onee-san here to help you, Yuu-chan, master how to make amazing retorts faster."

"....."

Until now, it was hard to find the chance to make such a retort against her... How extraordinary.

"Anyway, such was our benefactor and master, Catgirl-senpai. Even when there was a script, she was always happy to ad-lib, transforming the play into something more fun every single time. As long as the core parts of the play weren't incorrect, it was fine. Frankly speaking, DevTru Rikka-chan's idea to take things in a more interesting direction would be something that Senpai would have approved of with pleasure."

She was extraordinary, but. She was merely joking, but.

Amaniji-senpai – she was a kind upperclassman.

I thoughtlessly overstepped my bounds and asked about something sensitive – it was truly inexcusable, for me to abuse the mood like that.

“...Is that so?”

And so.

Because of those feelings for that upperclassman, and the memories that have accumulated as a result –

“Anyway, that’s why – that’s why we wanted to do to something like this for our last performance. We really sorry for getting you caught up in our club’s circumstances. And for telling you a story that would make you feel sympathy for us.”

It was why Amaniji-senpai had been so desperate to perform the play and was why she had been willing to take whatever means necessary.

It was why she called out to Rikka and me.

For me to not feel sympathy for her was an impossible task.

“That’s... personally, I’m glad that I’m able to help you out.”

“Really? If that’s how you feel about it, then we’re glad. We’re truly delighted to be able to talk to you about all this, Yuu-chan.”

“If it makes you feel delighted, then I’m glad too.”

“Ahaha, and sorry for making the mood so serious with my story. That isn’t our character at all. We should be saying something that’s more strange!”

“Not really, and I’m not sure why you’re so fixated on that...”

I’m starting to worry that others would say that I only associate with people who say weird things.

Now that I think about it, out of the people I know, only Nibutani doesn’t say weird things.

Although it would be a mistake, I’m wanting to talk with Nibutani.

What a blunder...!

“Although we’ve told Yuu-chan about it, we’d appreciate it if you kept this a secret from the other two. We wouldn’t want for them to be concerned about this.”

“Got it. I’ll keep secret about it.”

In response to my words, Amaniji-senpai let out a smile.

And in order to not erase that smile, I’ll have to give it my all for the play.

On that note, however, there’s another problem.

In regard to the guerrilla nature of the play – the timing for raising that matter for today had just passed.

Well, there’s still time, so guess I’ll discuss things with her again tomorrow.

“Now then, if Yuu-chan’s free, let’s think about the ‘Dark Flame Master’ setting together! Together – let’s properly think about it and make it interesting!”

“...Yes!”

“By the way, Yuu-chan, what’s the Dark Flame Master?”

...That? That was my creation.

That’s right, that was my creation, and so we had to think about it properly together.

“...My, it’s my sealed power that I’ve since lost.”

Despite it making me feel a little nihilistic in a chuuni-like way, I rambled on about my embarrassing creation to Amaniji-senpai at length.

The greatest redeeming factor was that Amaniji-senpai was, without laughing at anything in particular, listening to my story seriously.

Rather, she seemed to long for something similar, saying: “What a strange power! We wish that we had a strange power like that.” Guess Amaniji-senpai was interested in having something like that as well.

We must have mixed in some similar silly conversations as we added to the script, as quite some time had passed.

When I turned to look at the clock, it was almost time for me to go.

Since I made a promise to go home with the others, I had to head back to school again.

Then again, since the two of us had worked on the script right up to the point when school closes, we just managed to finish the revised script.

“Phew, it’s finally finished, isn’t it?” I said as I took a breather.

As if to thank me, Amaniji-senpai, with a tender voice, responded:

“Thanks for your hard work. Surely, the script has improved manyfold! Anyone who doesn’t think this script is interesting – said patron must have plain tastes!”

In that case, what we had then was a terrible story.

Chapter 6: Sleeping Funny Man

“You see... even if I utilised the power of the Devilish Truth Stare, the pollution of the Earth wouldn’t immediately cease. It’s not going to be good if this continues...! Ugh... Yuuta, you head there first...!”

September 3rd. Today, school only lasted until noon – right now, classes were finished for the day.

There were 6 days till the cultural festival.

There was barely any time left to practice for the play at all.

Because of how little time we had left, I wanted to head to practice as soon as possible. However, when I asked Rikka to come along, she rejected me with that amusing line.

Incidentally, the way she was holding the cleaning broom with both hands made her look like a hero who was about to depart. It was very cool.

“Ah, right. You were on cleaning duty today. Got it, I’ll head there first. I’ll go tell our upperclassmen that you’ll be a bit late due to cleaning duty.”

“Roger, operation ‘Earth’s Normalisation’ start! Incidentally, Yuuta. The Earth isn’t currently under attack right now!?”

“Where did that come from!? No, it not! In fact, it has never been attacked! Not even once! Why would you even think that it is!?”

Then again, to be fair, there were lots of movies and anime where the Earth got attacked!

If the Earth didn’t get attacked, the story in those works would never begin!

“I see. However, I often hear stories about the Earth being attacked. Does that mean that there’s lots of people with the desire to attack the Earth?”

“Don’t put things like that! There’s nobody with such a desire!”

“In that case, does that mean Earth-san has a strong desire to be attacked? I see, so those desires are played out for Earth-san in stuff like movies. Roger, it has been understood!”

“You think Earth-san’s a M...?”

And, like that, we got swept up by the mood and started chatting.

“HEY! START CLEANING ALREADY!”

Rumour has it that she was the dance club’s future president.

She was also the popularly-supported committee chairman in charge of our class' program for this cultural festival.

She was the girl who boasts an overwhelming popularity with the boys of our class.

Within our class, she was the class king – with a demon-like expression, Nibutani Shinka came by to reproach us.

Or to assault us.

We-we're going to get killed...!

I was trembling with fear to the point where I couldn't even let out my voice. Rikka, however, was undaunted, delivering a firm reply to Nibutani.

"Mori-sama, we were in the middle of a very important discussion. The discussion of Earth's future. Also, the discussion of our future together."

"You still weren't finished with that!?"

I was so surprised that my voice came out.

Or rather, what are you declaring so jovially, Rikka-san!

No, wait, eh!? Hearing all that does makes me happy though!

"Pardon? Earth? There's no point worrying about something like that! When it'll explode it'll explode, and there's nothing that can be done about it! Now get to cleaning!"

"Grrr. Looks like it can't be helped, Yuuta. See you soon."

"Oh, okay. See you."

Parting with those words, Rikka trotted out of the classroom to go clean diligently.

I was left behind. I could more or less foresee how things will develop from here on out, and it was scary...

Nibutani's facial expression towards me reminded me of a Hannya mask²⁹. How did she become even scarier than before...?

"But aren't the two of you flirting a bit too much? Are you a, what's it called, an oranyan³⁰ when people are around?"

"What part of that conversation just then was us flirting!?"

It was only about the Earth! Moreover, that only flowed on from Rikka's outlandish conversation starter!

²⁹ A mask in Noh theatre (which is a major form of classical Japanese musical drama) that represents a jealous female demon.

³⁰ An oranyan (オラニャン) is a male who's cold to almost everyone but sweet to the girl he loves.

Also, what did you just say? That in public I was an oranyan? Looks like Nibutani's vocabulary was still as ancient as ever...

"Anyone who saw that conversation of yours would have thought that the two of you were flirting."

Supporting her arms with a broom, Nibutani stared at me with a normie-despising cold gaze, before letting out a deep "haaa".

Were things really to the point where you felt the need to sigh so exaggeratedly...?

It was merely a discussion about Earth.

"By the way, there's something I wanted to ask – it's about what Takanashi-san's up to. She's come up to me and said "I am still trying to master the dance, but for the time being I will practice at home, as I cannot make the dance rehearsals. Is permission granted?" What is that all about?"

"Why do you keep slipping impersonations in every now and then..."

Furthermore, her impersonations do seem to subtly resemble the real deal...

Then again, it may have just been the case that Rikka was easy to imitate.

"She was lending a bit of a hand to help out an upperclassman with her play. As a result, she ended up being the leading actress of the play. As expected, it's a problem, isn't it?"

"Mmm, not really. Takanashi-san: she's quite skilled. Even I was surprised by how good she was. It's not really a problem if she skips out on practice, since all she'll be doing is perfecting the dance even more. Still, why is she helping out with the play on such short notice?"

"Well, it's a long story."

"Hmm, is that so... Takanashi-san, she's changed a little," murmured Nibutani.

It seemed that those were her true thoughts.

It was rather surprising to be hearing those words from her.

"When I first met with her – I guess you could say that I had a few concerns about her, but it seems that she'll be fine now. Even without me rehabilitating her."

"You were still intending on rehabilitating her, huh..."

"Wasn't that obvious? However, if things turn sour – if she becomes Dark Takanashi-san – then her rehabilitation will commence straightaway."

"...'Dark Takanashi-san', huh. Right, guess from your perspective she's changing in a good way."

“Hmm? Yeah, I guess. It’s only natural that I want to rehabilitate her, since it’s irritating how she and Kazari keep pestering me with ‘Mori-sama Mori-sama’.”

...Wow, really?

Does that really happen? I’ve never seen it happen before, but it’s Rikka after all. She’s incredible.

“Still, it’s just by a bit, but my way of thinking has changed.”

“Way of thinking?”

“– I, if back then, if I too had someone like you, someone who would stay with me – maybe things like my dark history would have never occurred.”

“...That’s –”

“Just kidding! For the sake of maintaining White Takanashi-san, you need to keep being her wonderful boyfriend, Geruzoni.”

“Eh?”

I was surprised by how normal that was.

It wasn’t her words that surprised me, however – it was her smile. Nibutani... When did she become such a nice person? Maybe it was during summer vacation.

But when we met during the summer vacation, it didn’t seem like she had changed.

“Hey, what’s with the surprised face! It’s making me mad. I’m geki oko-stic finaleality punpun dream³¹ mad.”

“...That choice of words is quite chuunibyou-ish.”

It was like saying ‘Eternal Force Blizzard’.

“Eh, really!? Ah... AH, I’m geki oko punpun maru mad!”

“It’s too late to rephrase things in a cuter way.”

“Drop dead!”

As she said that, Nibutani looked down at me in her usual sadistic attitude.

I personally hated the masochistic feeling I got from our exchanges, but, yeah, as expected, our exchange just doesn’t feel right without it.

“Enough! You’re a hinderance to cleaning, shoo!”

³¹ This string of nonsensical words, along with the following “geki oko punpun maru” is meant to be gyaru talk for being mad. Out of the 6 stages, ‘geki oko-stic finaleality punpun dream’ is the most mad, while ‘geki oko punpun maru’ (which also sounds less ridiculous) is only the fourth-most mad.

“Ahh, right. Sorry for interrupting. Oh, right, there’s something that came to mind when you were extremely angry, and it’s about the play – if you’d like, Nibutani, you should come and see the play. I’m also appearing in it.”

“Geruzoni’s taking part? Ahahahahahahahaha!”

Nibutani was bursting with laughter, with her hands on her belly.

For her to laugh so much... It seemed that for her, me acting was something laughable...

“I can see it already! You doing something like forgetting your lines halfway in and adding to your dark history! I’m looking forward to—!”

“Something like that won’t happen! I’m quite confident in my acting skills: I play house everyday—”

And, as the words left my mouth, I realised what I accidentally let slip out.

As per usual, I make mistakes when I talk with Nibutani.

Moreover, it wasn’t just a careless mistake, it one of my biggest mistakes of my life. If a mistake like this happened in the workplace, I would be fired.

Naturally, when Nibutani heard my mistake, she didn’t miss the chance to let loose her sadistic smile.

“Ohh? So you play house. Hmhm, what, are you pretending to be a newlywed?”

“You-you’re wrong!”

“What is it then? Playing out a second marriage?”

“There’s no such scenario in playing house like that!”

You know, when you put things like that, you’re making it seem as if society views make-believe as a joke. I will definitely never forgive you for that. You need to be more romantic.

“Well, even if it was about you re-marrying, or about you pretending to be Saigou-san³², or about whatever—”

“What the hell’s “pretending to be Saigou-san”!?”

“You’re being so picky with every single thing! It’s a big mistake if you think that it’s a good idea to retort to everything!”

In response to my light retort, Nibutani blew up.

³² Potentially referring to Tanomo Saigou, a famous Japanese samurai. Yuuta did mention he wanted to be a samurai.

With a backhanded blow – it was my friend, the retort. It seems the chain of set-ups has been broken.

“AN.Y.WAY! Go away, shoo. Go loaf somewhere else.”

You were the one who called out to me first... But if I actually said that, she’ll unleash her sadistic side again, and so I decided to leave things at that.

“...Okay, sure. Well then, do your best with cleaning.”

“Geruzoni too, with, well, the play. In hang there?”

After saying that, Nibutani turned her back towards me and started to clean.

With what seemed to be words of encouragement from Nibutani, I left the classroom happy, thanking her for support in my heart.



As soon as I left the classroom, for some reason I couldn’t stop thinking about how enjoyable that brief after-school exchange was.

Once I was able to leave both my regrets and the classroom behind, I contemplated about dropping by class 1-3 to invite Shichimiya to head to the club together with me. Unfortunately, however, Shichimiya was also on cleaning duty today.

Since the two of them were both busy, I had no choice but to traverse through the school building, which was becoming increasingly lively due to the after-school preparations for the cultural festival, by myself. I lightly jogged my way to the principal’s office.

Given that I was alone today, unlike yesterday I arrived the principal’s office right away.

I was now before the principal’s office – like yesterday, it was dead silent here.

Since it was quite possible that the principal was here this time around, I took a few deep breaths.

– I’m ready.

I thought I was ready, but as it turns out, taking deep breaths did not help ease me at all. I was still rigid with nervousness when I knocked on the principal’s door twice.

Due to my extreme nervousness, I made very loud knocks.

More importantly, however: what would be an appropriate first thing to say to the principal?

As I deliberated in my head as to whether the principal would understand if I introduced myself as a helper to the Eccentric Drama Club, a few seconds had passed. There was no response from the room.

I opened the door and looked inside.

It seemed that all my worries were all for nothing, as the principal was absent from the office today as well.

And – just like yesterday, I was greeted by the same surreal sight.

In the principal's office by herself, Kumin-senpai was sleeping, with drool hanging from her mouth.

Every time I first catch sight of her, this person's been asleep...

There was a point of difference from yesterday though, in terms of the pillow... Is that her personal pillow?

Either way, given how defenceless she was, I was a little worried that someone would come while she's asleep and attack her.

I contemplated about leaving her asleep, but it would be a problem for my sanity (not because I was on the verge of attacking her, but because I was worried about the drool) if she kept sleeping. I guess I should wake her up after all...

"Since you're asleep, sorry," I mentally apologised as I approached the defenceless Kumin-senpai.

Wow, she's completely full of openings... S-she might as well be naked.

With thoughts like that entering my head, my mind was thrown into complete disarray.

Deep breaths... Regaining my calmness, I adjusted my voice to match the same volume I had the last time I woke her up.

"Umm, there's drool hanging out."

...She didn't wake up.

It appears that she was in a much deeper sleep than last time.

Hmm, why was that the case?

Still, regardless of why, I couldn't leave her like this, and so I grabbed onto her shoulders lightly and shook her.

"Excuse me, pleeease wake up, you have drool hanging out from your mouth."

Seemingly in response to my shaking, Kumin-senpai woke up, slowly raising her body as she let out "Kayy" in a half-awake voice.

As soon as she moved – I released my grip. This was a delicate situation, after all.

At the same time, Kumin-senpai – who had prepared a handkerchief in her hand in advance – wiped off the drool from her face, before turning her face nimbly in my direction. She then blinked twice, as if to confirm the current situation.

Then, while staring at me with eyes still half-shut, she opened her mouth.

“...Was that just now an interplate earthquake? Or was it an intraplate earthquake?”

“Aren’t you overreacting!? It was just a just a light jolt! Moreover, with the way you phrased that question, it doesn’t sound like you believe that an earthquake had happened at all! Aren’t you being too calm!?”

“...So, it wasn’t an earthquake? ...Zzz”

“No wait, please wait a minute! Please don’t fall asleep again now that you’re relieved!”

“Hehe, there’s no need to worry. I was merely saying “zzz”.”

“You were saying it after all!? Do you think that it’s fine to say something like that in the middle of the conversation!?”

“Hehe, there’s no need to worry. It was a set-up for a joke – I made a mistake, and so I pretended to be asleep³³.”

“Are you setting up for another joke!?”

Was this entire exchange a setup!?

That’s amazing, Kumin-senpai...!

She had only just gotten up, and yet she had already prepared the set-up for a joke... It was marvellous to the point where it made me want to repeat our exchange again.

But even though it was enjoyable – sigh.

Well, then again, I was just thinking how fun it was waking her up again. I’m low-key looking forward to doing this again, if there’s a next time.

As Kumin-senpai rubbed her eyes to wake herself up, I quietly took a seat.

I sat opposite of Kumin-senpai. It wasn’t like I could sit right next to her, after all.

“Yeah, I’m up, I’m up. Oodning.”

“...A greeting that’s not even seen in manga and novels!?”

Another setup!?

Is this too setting-up for joke!?

³³ I didn’t have a good way of translating this pun. One way of interpreting the original sentence, ネタ振り——間違えた、寝たふりだから, is that Kumin was making setting up for a joke (ネタ振り) and so she pretended to fall asleep (寝たふりだから) after making a mistake (間違えた). The pun here is that the two phrases ネタ振り and 寝たふり are read in the same way (netafuri). However, ふり is 振り in hiragana, which, in this case, means either to pretend or to lead in (a joke), meaning that another way of interpreting this sentence is: “I pretended to joke – whoops, I mean, I pretended to be asleep.”

“Ahaha, sorry, sorry. I’m still a bit half-asleep. Good morning!”

As Kumin-senpai said that, she stretched out her body, letting out an “Mmmm”. She still looked quite sleepy. That “Mmmm” was pretty cute...

Moreover, although she’s my upperclassman, she didn’t look that much older than me. Her face when she’s just woken up was quite cute too.

Although she had a short stature, her height wasn’t short to the point where her figure could be described as childlike (in fact, her figure was the complete opposite of childlike). It was just her face – which, for some reason, reminded me of the elder younger sister – that was extremely childlike. Although I’ve previously used this metaphor to describe someone else, there really was no better way to describe her appearance than “resembling a princess of a ruined country”.

She felt like someone you had protect.

“Good morning, Kumin-senpai. Um, I’m not sure if you want to hear this from an underclassman that you’ve just met, but... it’s probably better for you to not be sleeping where you’re so defenceless...”

“Hmm? Ah, you’re worried about me! Thanks for the concern~. Since I can sleep anywhere, I do get careless. I’m usually fast asleep in the nurse’s office though, so there’s no need for you to be worried about me, kay~?”

... Ah, I see. So back then, it was also her.

But, back then, wasn’t there – before I could finish my thought, Kumin-senpai raised the thing that was on my mind herself.

“But, then again, it’s not like the nurse’s office is completely safe either. Once in a while, I get doodled on. It’s annoying when Hideri-chan does that.”

“Good grief,” were what her shoulders seemed to say as she shrugged them.

I see, so it was Amaniji-senpai’s handiwork.

Although the doodle was probably made with a non-permanent marker, I could still understand Kumin-senpai’s annoyance. It would have still been embarrassing to be walking around without realising that there was that on her forehead.

Looks like I was right to leave a mirror for her back then.

“I think I saw something like that during one of the times I visited the nurse’s office: was that Amaniji-senpai’s handiwork? It is Amaniji-senpai-like to write something troublesome like ‘demon’ on someone’s forehead...”

“Eeeh, you saw that? Oof, how embarrassing.”

Kumin-senpai didn’t seem embarrassed as all as she held her forehead.

It may have been the case that she actually was embarrassed since she got a little red in the face. Still, as she wasn't panicking or anything, it was a little hard to tell.

She appeared a bit too relaxed.

"Hideri-chan tells me that my looks aren't very amusing; when she can she'll doodle on my face when I'm asleep. Me, am I really that dull? What do you think, Yuu-chan?"

...What a difficult question to answer.

If she was going to be pleased it, I'd be happy to tell her that her looks were amusing. Still, when you think about it, people aren't normally pleased to hear that they look amusing....

Then again, judging from her words just now, it seems that she's worried about not being amusing. Perhaps telling her that she's amusing is the right thing to do.

"Er, well, I guess it's a little amusing..."

"Eh? Yuu-chan, that's horrible, Yuu-chan: I'm on the verge of tears here."

It was a trap.

I was called horrible...! However, I had countermeasures planned out for something like this!

"No, what I meant by that was that it you shouldn't worry, since it's only a little amusing."

"Eh!? That's horrible! Me, I am amusing!"

It was a double-layered trap.

How formidable...! Still, I was only limiting it to her looks when I called her amusing – rather than about her looks, it seems her intention was to create the setup for the joke; to come and deliver that punchline... As expected, she really was a strange person.

Guess in that sense, it was no wonder that she got along with Amaniji-senpai so well.

"By the way, Kumin-senpai, I'm a bit curious – why are you in this club?"

"Heh heh, it's because I'm Hideri-chan's best friend!"

Kumin-senpai answered with her chest full of pride.

To Kumin-senpai, this was apparently something to be proud of.

"Hideri-chan doesn't have any other friends. That's why I'm her best friend!"

"Don't say something so cruel so nonchalantly!"

"Huh? But I don't think that's a terrible thing, having only a few friends. I too don't have many either."

Kumin-senpai gave me a gentle smile.

That's true, I thought.

I wasn't proud of the fact that the number of friends I had could be counted with both hands, but I wasn't overly pessimistic about it either.

Kumin-senpai – she gave off a frivolous impression, but it very well may be the case that this girl, at her core, was a strong-hearted person.

“...You're right. I'm sorry for saying something like that...”

“Ah, there's no need for you to apologise, Yuu-chan. It's unprecedented how difficult Hideri-chan is!”

“.....”

I didn't point it out, but the nonchalant way that it was phrased was extremely cruel.

Then again, in my eyes, Amaniji-senpai really was a rather unprecedented person in various ways.

She was a strange, distinctive, different, eccentric, unique, and peculiar person.

“Hideri-chan is, well, like you see, very individualistic – but I like that part of her very much~. She's the world's number one Hideri-chan.”

“The world's number one Hideri-chan.”

I tried repeating it, but it still didn't make much sense.

Perhaps what she's trying to say was that the only Amaniji-senpai-like person was Amaniji-senpai.

It is said that there are three other people in the world who resemble you, but that's definitely not the case for her. I was doubtful as to whether a doppelganger could even exist for her.

“Either way, it's fun being together with Hideri-chan, and so I joined the same club as her. I'm not very good at stuff like acting though~.”

“Haha, she's certainly not a person that you'd get tired of.”

“Eeeh, is that so? Well then, I'll turn the same question to you then: what made you want to help out this strange club, Yuu-chan?”

“Strange... Err, well, it's – it was because Amaniji-senpai was troubled before my eyes.”

When it comes down to it, my reason for helping was simple – it reached me. That hidden, earnest side of Amaniji-senpai.

The things she told me yesterday – it was *the* reason why I had to help Amaniji-senpai out.

I wanted to help her out. Her feelings had definitely reached me.

In addition, I wasn't sure why, but I was both curious and anxious about Amaniji-senpai's circumstances.

Perhaps – her circumstances had resonated within me somewhere.

"I see, it's because Yuu-chan is very kind~. Surely you're Mr. Popular~. Hehehe, alright, now let's talk about love³⁴ for a bit."

"Koi?"

I tilted my head upon hearing that unexpected mysterious word.

Did she want to talk about carp?

"While it's true that I do love to sleep with a Slyly³⁵ plush body pillow, and that I did want to talk about carp – I wanted to talk not about koi, but love!"

Kumin-senpai was mad. She leaned forward in anger.

Wh-what a strange, entrancing sensation.

The gentle Kumin-senpai getting mad – what a feeling of ecstasy!

...Well, see, even though I couldn't help but have thoughts like that, it didn't mean that I suddenly mutated into a pervert. I was just so surprised to the extent that it made me think things like that.

Please don't misunderstand; I'm not like that at all.

"Well, I guess boys do play dumb when it comes to the word called love~."

"No, that's not the case at all. Even men love talking about love. In fact, men are nothing but enthusiastic when it comes to talking about love."

"Excellent. Girls too also nothing but enthusiastic when it comes to talking about love. Especially when it's about someone else."

"I see. Everyone wants to be in love! Hmm? I seem to have heard something strange added there at the end..."

Yeah, it appears I'm getting a little caught up by the mood. I feel willing to talk about anything right now!

Hrm, it seems that her being mad just now triggered Ecstasy Mode in me.

Henceforth, a new setting for me, Yuuta (Ecstasy Mode), which triggers when Kumin-senpai gets mad, has been established! The use of this mode from now onwards, however, is forbidden.

³⁴ Love (こい, koi) shares the same pronunciation as koi, a type of carp.

³⁵ One of the two mascots for the Hiroshima Toyo Carp baseball team.

Kumin-senpai also noticed that I had entered this state. She made a serious-looking face and stared right into my eyes.

“Well then, let us begin our talk about love.”

“Go ahead.”

“Rikka-chan, Satone-chan, Hideri-chan, and me: who do you like out of us four, Yuu-chan?”

“Rikka!” I declared definitively.

There was no hesitation behind my response. This is the power of Ecstasy Mode!

...This person, what is she making me say all of a sudden!?

“Reject, I got rejected...”

“Ah, no, that’s... Err, well, see, me, I’m currently going out with Rikka, and so that’s why... umm... so it’s not that I hate you, Kumin-senpai, and of course not Shichimiya nor Amaniji-senpai either...”

“What!?”

“You didn’t know!?”

“It’s the first I’ve heard of this. Is that so, I didn’t know.”

It seemed that this was a revelation for her. Since Amaniji-senpai knew, I thought for sure that Kumin-senpai also knew, but it seemed that wasn’t the case.

Normally, you wouldn’t know about the relationship status of your underclassmen... Only now did that thought cross my mind.

Then again, it wasn’t like it was going to be troublesome if she knew, so as long as she was fine with learning about my relationship with Rikka only now, there shouldn’t be any problems.

“I see~. Now then, have you kissed?”

“.....”

Kumin-senpai had a huge grin as she asked me that strange question.

She was like an annoying uncle...

Unfortunately, it seems that my time in Ecstasy Mode has come into an end. It seems that I can only remain transformed for three minutes. From now onwards, I’m my normal self.

“There’s no need to be embarrassed, Yuu-chan. Isn’t it something that everyone can do~?”

“While it is something everyone can do, your question is unfortunately one I cannot answer.”

I’m invoking my right to remain silent. Even if what she was telling me was true, there was no need for her to know.

“I haven’t done it~.”

“Were you expecting me to speak up about my own experience since you were frank about yours!?”

“Hideri-chan hasn’t either~.”

“Even if you’re frank about someone else experience, the answer’s still no!”

It was revealed without permission too.

Poor Amaniji-senpai.

“Hmm, to not playing along and lay bare your heart: you’re heartless, Yuu-chan³⁶.”

“Even a nonchalantly delivered bad pun won’t help. I have no desire to be sympathetic to such an appeal.”

“Well, whatever. There’s a scene in the play where Cinderella and the Prince kisses, so I can see for myself whether you have kissed before then~.”

“There’s a scene like that!?”

But yesterday, I checked over the script, and there wasn’t such a scene present!?

As I was quickly working myself up into a panic, Kumin-senpai – who had a large grin on her face – placed the script on the table. The script was flipped open to the page with the scene in question.

“Here, at the very end. There’s a heart, right? That’s the scene.”

“W-wh-why is the only scene that borrows from the setting of the original *Cinderella* the ending!? N-no, no way! Besides, what’s to say that the heart signifies a k-kiss...!”

I was in such a state of turmoil that I started quivering. I was fumbling my words too.

Eh!? Wait, you were being serious!?

“It’s a kiss~.”

“.....!”

³⁶ Literally translated, the sentence is: “Hmm, to not playing along and confess: you’re heartless, Yuu-chan.” The original pun here was between the words 白状し (meaning to confess) and 薄情 (meaning heartless), as they are both pronounced はくじょう (hakujiō).

Kumin-senpai made that remark definitively, unimpeded by my inner turmoil.

Her complete lack of hesitation in making that remark – or you could say, in talking about someone else’s affairs³⁷ – helped me to come back to my senses.

For the time being, let’s put the subject of whether I’ve missed – damn it, I’m still shaken.

Let’s put the subject of whether I’ve kissed on hold for now.

“Well, it’s fine, isn’t it? Since you’re going out with her. Honestly though, I’d would have been fine with two girls sharing a passionate kiss~.”

“Just because there is a large demand for such a thing, it –”

As I was in the middle of my sentence, I remembered.

I remembered – the story from yesterday.

“What’s wrong, Yuu-chan? Your face is all tensed up. Do you find girls kissing disgusting?”

As usual, my face was quite honest with how I was feeling.

Her secret... Maybe it would be better for me to come out and talk about it, since I wasn’t able to hide it.

“No, that’s not what I meant at all – I’m sorry for being unclear... Yesterday, I heard... I heard a little about your upperclassman... and so I... or rather, for me to do that...”

“Ah, did you hear it from Hideri-chan? Right, right, Catgirl-senpai was the person who was meant to take Hideri-chan’s first kiss. In other words, what you’re trying to say, Yuu-chan’s, is that you’ve stolen Hideri-chan’s first kiss.”

“No, that not what I meant at all!?”

With my choice of words, I was just begging to be misunderstood.

Plus, since I said it all with a serious face, it probably further added to the misunderstanding.

“Ahaha, it was a joke~. Did it cheer you up?”

“No, it didn’t – but thank you for trying.”

Ah, to be honest right now... I was feeling miserable.

I made someone worry about me once again.

³⁷ An untranslatable pun. Here, Yuuta makes the connection between the word remark (一言) and the phrase someone else’s affairs (他人事), as they are both share similar pronunciations (ひとこと [hitokoto] and ひとつと [hitogoto]).

However, like before, the kindness of these upperclassmen – it really saved me.

“Still, for Yuu-chan to speak of Catgirl-senpai, Hideri-chan must have said something.”

“That’s right, but I was the one who asked her about it.”

“I see~. Since she can’t meet with senpai anymore, Hideri-chan – she hasn’t talked about senpai in forever.”

“Ah –”

I didn’t know what it was that I originally wanted to say, but I wasn’t able to say anything else.

Noticing my predicament, Kumin-senpai gave a gentle smile.

“There’s no need to worry. Even if they are unable to meet, senpai will live on in Hideri-chan’s heart for all of eternity. Hehe, in fact I think that good thing that Hideri-chan has told you about her. I’m sure that Hideri-chan’s told you about senpai since she’s really fond of you, Yuu-chan.”

“That’s... that’s wrong, I forced –”

“You really are Mr. Worry, Yuu-chan. Normally – even when forcing her – if she didn’t want to talk about it, then she wouldn’t have said anything about it at all. Not to say that Hideri-chan is normal, but – to Hideri-chan, Catgirl-senpai is ‘special’.”

“...Special.”

“She’s such a child, that Hideri-chan.”

As she said that, Kumin-senpai nodded her head as if to agree with herself.

Special to Amaniji-senpai, huh?

It sounded like she was a very special person.

I was extremely curious as to the type of person that Catgirl-senpai was. However, it didn’t seem right for me to enquire and hear about her any further. Just when I was about to change the subject –

“Do you want to hear an amusing story about Hideri-chan and Catgirl-senpai?”

Kumin-senpai said that. Moreover, she continued:

“Are you interested?”

“You’ve raised quite the high bar...”

“Ahaha, it’s because you’ve told me that you know about Catgirl-senpai. I was wondered if you wanted to hear a bit more about her~.”

“...Err, in that case, please go ahead.”

“Yay! You see, Hideri-chan, she seriously admires Catgirl-senpai – she admires her so much that one time, she came to school wearing a cat costume, and said things like “We’ve become Catgirl-senpai”. The teachers got so mad at her, they made her write an apology letter! Well? Amusing, wasn’t it~?”

“.....”

As a result of the bar being set so high, it was questionable as to whether I could say that story was amusing: rather, it just seemed like a very Amaniji-senpai-like thing for her to do.

She’s someone who goes out of their way to be extraordinary.

At any rate, Amaniji-senpai... Is it that you’re fond of mascot costumes?

Rather, for that to be deemed against the rules even at our school... looks like I was mistaken in my belief that at our school, anything goes.

“Huh, was that not amusing to you? Ri-right, this next one will definitely be amusing!”

“No, it’s not that it wasn’t amusing, but rather... the bar you’ve set –”

“Wait, let me tell one more! If this one isn’t amusing, I’ll give you my pillow!”

“You’re setting the bar even higher!?”

Kumin-senpai’s honestly incredible.

Normally, you’d be begging for the bar to not be set any higher.

I wonder if this too was due to her airheadedness... looks like every member of the Eccentric Drama Club was extraordinary!

“Umm, let’s see, Catgirl-senpai really was a bit strange. Speaking of her being strange, she was a strange person in that she was always wearing cat ears –”

Kumin-senpai began to reminisce about Catgirl-senpai slowly.

You could tell that she missed Catgirl-senpai.

Since there’s this nostalgic mood, I’m deeply sorry for this, but I couldn’t resist. My bad habit – the need to retort to everything – showed itself.

“Eh!? At this school, wearing cat ears is fine!?”

“Ahaha, but you see, Catgirl-senpai only wore them during club activities. She really was a peculiar upperclassman. She would say stuff like, ‘It’s my identity! Heh heh heh, since this is the Eccentric Drama Club, I must show off my individuality!’”

“Ah, so it was only during club activities... Sorry, I just...”

“However, it was probably also fine if she wore them all the time too. There was even a period of time where the principal mimicked her~.”

“.....”

Really, that principal. Nothing was out of bounds for that person.

Hearing this made me really want to know the reason why mascot costumes were deemed as against the school rules.

“Yeah, so that was the sort of person she was. A person who cherished having great individuality. And a person who’s always doing strange things. Like adding strange menu options to the school’s cafeteria and asking the cafeteria staff to make it, or like conducting after-school lessons despite not being a teacher. She was a third-year student, yet she gave off the impression that she was set for the university entrance exams.”

“...She sounds like a really amazing upperclassman.”

“Yep, that’s right. She was an amazing upperclassman. And a funny upperclassman. A wonderfully kind upperclassman too. Hideri-chan and I were the only other club members back then – first years who still didn’t know their left from their right. Even so, she still taught us all sorts of different things. In fact, the current play is also related to Catgirl-senpai –”

“I’ve already heard about all this from Amaniji-senpai. It’s why – why she wanted to perform the play no matter what, right?”

“Oh, you’ve already heard all this before? It’s rather unusual though, for Hideri-chan to be talking about this. That’s right – it was actually the script for the play we were meant to perform at last year’s cultural festival, but Catgirl-senpai hurt herself. As a result, this play was meant to be shelved, but Hideri-chan – see, she wanted to make this make sure that this was the club’s last play at all costs.”

“...Is that so?”

“Hideri-chan – even now, she has almost no interest in anything but “strange people”, right? That’s why, I’m of the belief that she earnestly reveres the things that Catgirl-senpai had left behind. This play too is no exception –this script, I wonder if senpai wanted for it to be performed as a guerrilla play?”

For no more than a brief moment, Kumin-senpai looked towards the skies as she spoke. Her eyes appeared to be looking at the distant past.

It seemed that a great deal of Amaniji-senpai’s feelings were also contained in Kumin-senpai’s words just now.

These earnest feelings– they’ve reached me now.

That’s why.

In response to these thoughts – I couldn’t reject them out of hand. It was impossible. I couldn’t ignore them.

The feelings of Kumin-senpai, and the person called Catgirl-senpai – I didn't want for their wishes to not be met.

However, it might just be my own selfishness that's making me feel this way.

Unconsciously, I –

"The guerrilla aspect about this play too – you want that be a success, right?"

– let that slip out.

It really was done unconsciously.

I was still hesitant about its guerrilla nature, which might have been an annoyance for her – if she got mad, I'll apologise to her by prostrating myself.

"That's right, and so everyone will need to work hard~! Ahaha, sorry, I was supposed to be telling you an amusing story, but instead I told a memorable one. Guess I'll have to give Yuu-chan my pillow..."

"It's fine, there's no need for that. It was an amusing story. So that was the sort of person your upperclassman. Still, wasn't the script that she had had in mind really unreasonable? The club only had three members, and yet the script had five main roles."

"Right? However, it's persuasive when she says stuff like: "Aren't things more interesting when you're given lots of roles? It's impossible for the leading actress to have another role though, since she's on the stage the entire time." Incidentally, I originally also had the 'Lord of Witches' role~. Although it was sad to have been dropped from the role, I'm still full of spirit! "

"That's not the sort of line the Witch of *Cinderella* would say."

It was as out of place as if a witch gotten on a deck brush.

Still, if she really did say such strange and compelling words, I could see how they would be convinced.

I could sort of understand why Amanij-senpai admired her.

"But, I do think that it's more interesting to be able to work together with Yuu-chan and friends~. With more people, there'll be a lot more individuality. That's why I'm so glad that you guys are helping out~!"

"Hearing something like that, it makes me –"

Right when I started to say something –

BAM! It was the sound of the door opening.

Turning my eyes towards the door, there happened to be three people there – Rikka, Shichimiya, and Amaniji-senpai entered the principal's office together, stating in unison "delayed due to cleaning duty!"

The three of them were getting along quite well. Incidentally, only Rikka was ‘delayed due to cleaning duty’.

With their arrival, all the members of the Eccentric Drama Club have now gathered.

...Now what do I say?

It’s rather uplifting to have everyone present.

I’m probably feeling this way largely as a result of having just spoken with Kumin-senpai about the circumstances surrounding the play.

At first only wanted to help her out little by little, but now it’s different.

Now – I too want for this play to be a complete success.

That’s what I’ll say.

And so I said it. Earnestly. Sincerely.

“Amaniji-senpai! Me, I’ll give it my absolute all with the play! Even the guerrilla aspect of it, let’s do it and shock everybody with it!”

Amaniji-senpai was completely dumbfounded, with eyes turning into dots from surprise as I added at the end, “Let’s give it our all with practice!” She then grinned, and –

“It’s so like you, Yuu-chan, for you to surprise us! However, it’s normal to practice normally! As such, we’ll never do something like the usual full run-through to practice! The play will be more interesting if it’s performed with no rehearsals! Ah, but please do properly memorise all the dialogue and the flow of events! That’s all for today! Now then, let’s all have lunch together!”

– announced all that.

This time, it was my turn for my eyes to become dots.

“Give my determination back to meeeeeeeee!!!”

I couldn’t help but scream.

Chapter 7: Death Devil

In the end, not even once did we practice normally – it was now September 8th.

In other words, it was now the day before the cultural festival.

It had only been a week since summer vacation ended, and yet it felt as if a lot longer had passed.

Although the large event known as the cultural festival was just around the corner, it had been overshadowed by the fact that I had been preoccupied by an event for every day of this week.

The event that had consumed my week – the Eccentric Drama Club’s final activity.

Even though we didn’t practice normally at the meetings, we still gathered as a club together daily.

And now, it was after the end of today’s activities – I was currently in the middle of walking home from school with Rikka.

“It was a fierce battle today as well. Arc-san and Siesta-san are strong!”

Rikka appeared cheerful as she spoke.

To be able to see a scene like this – it truly was a sight for sore eyes.

I was seeing the thing that made me the happiest: Rikka’s smiling face.

It made me really grateful that we were able to participate in the activities of the Eccentric Drama Club together.

Thinking back on it – through the course of our activities at the Eccentric Drama Club, not even once did we practice for the play normally.

The day after the announcement that there was to be no normal forms of practice – Sunday, September 4th.

We were unable to meet as a club at school given that it was a day off, so instead we gathered at a karaoke.

We gathered for a karaoke competition between all the members.

Per Amaniji-senpai: “Firstly, we start with vocal training. Since normal vocal drills are very boring, we’ll be practicing via karaoke instead. Moreover, there’s no better place to express one’s peculiar idiosyncrasies³⁸ than karaoke!”

Wow.

³⁸ Same kanji (特殊性癖) for what I’ve translated earlier as “special fetish”, giving Yuuta’s following line its double meaning.

Still, and just like what senpai was expecting, everyone laid bare their peculiar idiosyncrasies(?).

Naturally, Rikka gave a solo performance, and poured her heart and soul into her songs (she had consented to having the Eccentric Drama Club watch her performance). Amaniji-senpai too gave it her all and showcased her kink by banging her head to every song.

Given that the performances of Shichimiya and I were overshadowed by those two and that the performances themselves were embarrassing, I'll omit the details about us singing.

As for Kumin-senpai, she had fallen asleep midway through the session. After she had sung a few songs, it was nap time for her.

For her to be able to sleep in such an environment: it wasn't normal.

In a sense, she had taken a form that best expressed her most peculiar idiosyncrasy.

Then, on the following days – from September 5th to September 7th – we spent our time after school in the principal's office, making costumes.

Per Amaniji-senpai: "Since it's one role per person, we'll be making unique costumes for the play! The person who makes the costume that most lives up to the idiosyncratic nature of the Eccentric Drama Club wins!"

In a way, that viewpoint of hers was quite reasonable.

As the script originally had for two roles per person (as well as its guerrilla nature), it was originally for the best that our costumes were just our school uniform adorned with small trinkets.

However, since it was now one person per role, it was good for each role's costume to be as flashy as possible, as that way it became easier to differentiate who was who.

And so, everyone started to make their own costumes.

Over the course of those three days, I had a lot of fun. Making the costumes whilst having pleasant chats with the other club members was great.

Especially since sewing wasn't my strong point, I was helped by the others in making my costume. In addition to Rikka, who burns with an unusual zeal when it comes to making costumes, I was also aided by Shichimiya, a prodigy whose enthusiasm seemed to rival Rikka's, and Amaniji-senpai, who had (in a bit of a bad way) an overwhelming sense of colour. Thanks to their help, I believe that I was able to make something good.

As for Kumin-senpai – during the club activities she didn't nap at all, and instead worked in earnest on making her costume. She was also surprisingly good at it too. When I asked her about how she was so skilled, she puffed her chest out and answered: "I can sew because I sometimes make my own pillowcases~."

Somehow, girls who can sew have not gone extinct.

Although three days was quite short, everyone had finished on making their costumes (which had matched their owner's personality to a T), and so today, September 8th, we held a game tournament in the principal's office.

Per Amaniji-senpai: "It doesn't feel normal at all, for everyone to be doing stuff like playing games at such a critical period. It's kind of like playing games the day before a test. So, let's enjoy ourselves with everything we've got!"

So started our enjoyable game time – needless to say, no one was able to match Rikka-san.

She was without peer.

By the way, the game we played was a game that could be played by 5 players at once, *Super Bomberman 3* (it was the principal's personal copy). However, and showing just how peerless she was, we even lost against Rikka 1 v 4.

It goes without saying, but Rikka seemed to have had the most fun.

But, well, looking back on how happy Rikka was, I too could accept what had happened today.

I also had a good time as well.

"From tomorrow onwards it'll be the cultural festival. Soon... it's too soon. Recently, it feels that time has been passing too quickly – is there something happening to me?" asked Rikka.

What a cute question.

"Well, it's the same for me as well, Rikka. After entering high school, time feels as if it's passed very fast."

"Is that so? If Yuuta too feels the same way, then it's alright."

Relieved, Rikka nodded her head once.

"If Yuuta has the same syndrome, then we'll be passing away at the same time."

"....."

Was this a disease?

Although if it really were one, it'd be quite the scary disease.

The rapid passing of fun times – although it seemed rather fictional, hearing Rikka talk about me made me feel as if I really did contract such a strange disease.

Yeah. Her words had that sort of power.

"Yuuta... please listen to me for a bit. About tomorrow's dance: to be honest, I'm actually a little anxious about it. I feel as if some my powers of darkness won't come out..."

"Anxious?"

"Yeah, but only just a little. Since it's my first time doing something like this."

"...I too am quite anxious about my part; surely, everyone else is too. Even so, I'm sure things will turn out fine. So just do your best, Rikka."

"...Right. Yeah, if Yuuta says so, then it's alright."

After saying that, she nodded her head again. This time, however, it was done bashfully.

For even Rikka to also be feeling anxious about this situation: it made me want to do something to wipe away her unease. What would be a good way of doing that?

.....

...Nothing came to mind.

Guess I'll just keep pondering about it until tomorrow.

"But as for the play, I'm not worried about it at all. Since Yuuta is together with me."

"Well... I'm worried about it though... I mean, in the end, we didn't even practice normally once, did we?"

"I have been practicing by myself, so I'm fine. Right now, together – do you want to practice?"

"It's fine, I too have been practicing by myself – or rather, been practicing with Yumeha. Even so, anxiety's still anxiety. I'm not good at performing like you or Shichimiya."

"That's not true. Yuuta just needs act naturally as the Dark Flame Master: it's super simple!"

"...Indeed."

Though personally, I found that the hardest part.

However, given that I could dramatically increase my own acting abilities by calling on the me of the past for help, there... shouldn't be a problem on that front.

It would depend on the situation at the time as to whether it could be used though.

I guess I've got to get Kumin-senpai angry then.

"Yuuta, your face is a bit weird."

"Eh, ah, oh, it's nothing!"

And with a vague statement like that, I tried to brush things off.

As usual, my acting in times of emergencies was awful.

“Really? If that’s the case, then there’s no problem. Since Yuuta had the face of someone who wanted someone else to be angry at him.”

“Isn’t that too definitive for a mere face!?”

“It’s the ability of the Devilish Truth Stare. To know everything about Yuuta.”

“Everything?”

“Everything.”

She affirmed it immediately.

I’m not sure if I should be happy or scared about it.

After that exchange, Rikka, with a carefree smile, talked at length about tomorrow, the dance, the costumes, and the play.

Like how fun things were going to be.

And how pleasant things were going to be.

And how great things were going to be.

She spoke about it all.

Suddenly – I thought back to how things were several months ago.

Before the two of us started going out, Rikka was always alone. She was expressionless as she attended school; a girl whose head was always tilted when it was time for math.

The days of her being like that seemed so distant that it almost felt nostalgic.

Nowadays, Rikka’s no longer like that at all.

Now – there’s only the Rikka who was happy, who was delighted, who had fun, and was all smiles every day.

That alone was enough to make me feel blessed.

It’s why I too will need to keep doing my best as well.

That’s why I told her this.

“The cultural festival, let’s go enjoy it together.”

“Yeah!” replied Rikka with her best smile.



Because my conversation with Rikka was so enjoyable, I was a bit late in returning home.

It was now almost night-time.

The blood red sky was slowly giving way to an indigo blue.

Having parted ways with Rikka, I was now on my way home.

Currently in my line of sight was the back of a girl walking just a few steps ahead of me.

As she walked by herself, she shook her long twin-tails around, causing her long shadow to move as well.

Twin-tails – it wasn't quite accurate to call her hair that, given that her hairstyle was a bit different from actual twin-tails, but if I was forced to briefly describe her, I would describe her as a twin-tailed girl.

On the ends of her twin-tails, however, was something dangerous attached – if you only looked at the shadow cast by the setting sun, you would think that there was a hammer was affixed to the ends of her hair.

In addition, the colour of her hair was similar to the colour of milk tea, a beautiful light brown.

Just from that, I could figure out who she was. There was only one person in the entire world who would fit that description.

Dekomori Sanae.

A girl who Rikka newly contracted as her servant during summer vacation; a girl in her third year of middle school.

As she wasn't in her school uniform, I'm guessing that she was on her way back after having made an outing somewhere.

In any case, she was wearing amazing Lolita-styled clothes. It felt as if I was looking at Rikka.

Hmm.

I mean, although she was merely an acquaintance, given that she was walking right before my eyes (and alone too), that she was a middle school student, and that it was almost night-time, it was probably necessary for me to watch over her so that she doesn't get caught up with any weird people.

There were enough reasons for me to feel a need to escort her.

...Yeah, that's right.

Given that I've already given thought to escorting her, I would feel very bad should something happen to Dekomori on her way home. As such, I'll escort her home. We're more or less acquainted after all.

On that note, it was quite possible that Dekomori might view me as said weird person, but let's just turn a blind eye to that possibility.

There's only one person in the entire world who would want for themselves to be treated as a weird person, and that person's most likely that upperclassman.

With that in mind, I increased my pace and called out to her from behind.

"Oi, Dekomori--!"

It seems that she recognised my voice, as she stopped and looked back.

However, "an acquaintance" seemed to also be the degree in which she knew me.

It appeared that she couldn't tell who I was, as she glared at me for a bit with eyes as if I was someone suspicious – "Huh? Who's this? Is this someone one of my friends knows?" was what her eyes seemed to say.

What an oddly specific glare.

"Ah, it's DFM-death."

"Hey! Don't say it abbreviated!"

I have no idea who this 'DFM' is.

...But, what I do know for sure is that it's 'Dark Flame Master' in full!

"Aren't you the selfish person-death. Let's see now, Dekomori's pretty sure it was...

^{D F M}
Door Floor Masker-san-death³⁹...?"

"The hell!? You don't even know what it's short for!?"

"Pfft, Dekomori is part of the faction who do not use strategy guides-death!"

"Is my full name only listed in a strategy guide or something!?"

Rather, why did that girl randomly say bring strategy guides up!?

What a fascinating leap of logic.

"What-death? Why do you look so surprised? What is it-death? Ah, is it that you found what Dekomori had said so fascinating that you wished for Dekomori to repeat herself-death? Looks like it can't be helped-death. Why, see, what Dekomori said was that unlike your lowly self, Dekomori is the type of existence that detests the use of strategy guides-death!"

"Your words have no modesty at all! More importantly, isn't it strange to be using something like this as a pretext to establish that excessively chuunibyou setting!?"

³⁹ In the original Japanese text, Dekomori remembers DFM as ^{D F M}団地ふすまもしもし (danchi fusuma moshimoshi; literally Apartment Complex Fusuma [type of Japanese sliding panel] Hello) instead of ダークフレイムマスター (dauku fureimu mastutau). To retain the joke, it is translated here as a bunch of nonsense that rhymes with Dark Flame Master.

“Chuunibyou? What is the Dark Flame Master on about-death? It seems that you’ve either gone crazy or insane-death. Dekomori’s words were not a pretext for something-death: there weren’t even any parentheses attached-death!”

“.....”

“To begin with, Dekomori is not infected by a funny disease like that-death. Did you forget-death? Dekomori’s ability is the power to move between the 2D and 3D realm-death!”

“What? That’s dangerous! Bring me along to the 2D realm too!”

As usual, I was feeling envious.

Well, but I mean, anyone would be envious of such an ability.

More importantly though, she remembered that it was the Dark Flame Master.

“By the way, what are you doing in a place like this-death? Ah, is it because of Master? If it were like usual, you were probably flirting with Master while the two of you were together, saying “Rikka Rikka Rikka Rikka Rikka”, weren’t you-death? To be honest, Dekomori envies you-death.”

“Oi, don’t make me such a lovey-dovey type of person. I have never done such a thing. ...Though I did part with Rikka here just now.”

“Have never done...? Ah, so it’s like that-death. So you’re that sort of person, the type who excessively flirts only at parting, aren’t you? Dekomori frequently comes across people like you in front of the ticket gates at the train station-death. Dekomori calls people like you a ‘Station Carressing Lover’-death!”

“Don’t call me something that detestable! But, well... I too see people like that quite often!”

What was up with those type of people anyway?

Why do they do stuff like clinging to each other in public, and getting teary when they part?

“It was meant to be a joke-death. As expected, someone like you was too stupid to figure that out-death. Your brain must be made out of candy-death. Then again, it’s not like that part of you bothers Dekomori and Master-death... Ge-heh-heh-heh...!”

“You know, Dekomori... you are a girl: you should laugh in a cuter manner...”

“Hmph. It seems like you don’t comprehend just how elegant this laugh is-death, kepupupu.”

“That’s not cute at all!”

“Ah! Damn-death! It was a trap-death! You coward-death!”

And, with an expression that signalled that she felt really hurt, Dekomori turned on her heel and walked away.

I had trouble telling if she was walking away due to shock or walking away since she didn't have any urgent business here. Either way, since her pace was slow, I ended up walking right next to her, and was heading home together with her.

...Was she seriously feeling down? Even though she's a deko⁴⁰.

I highly doubt that that was the case here.

Still, it would be bad if I did end up hurting a middle school girl, and so it was best that I said something positive to her next.

"Um, listen, Rikka's also likes the way things currently are between you and her. It's just, well, as you might expect, it's hard for me to overlook you saying that I act like a
S t a t i o n P e t
Station Carressing Lover."

"Oh? Suddenly the Door Floor Masker is looking down on Dekomori-death! It can't be, you're acting as if you're her boyfriend?"

"I am her boyfriend! More importantly, don't try to make that name work!"

What a fast flip-flop that was! Just a moment ago, I was being treated as an overly lovey-dovey boyfriend. Moreover, she wasn't feeling down at all.

Since her reversal came so fast, I ended up wasting my breath yelling at her.

Why was it a waste of breath? It was because my angry voice didn't even make Dekomori flinch: rather, she continued on with the conversation.

"? But Master has never said that you were her boyfriend-death?"

"No, but she had said that I'm her contractee, right?"

"If that's the case, then Dekomori is also Master's boyfriend, since Dekomori is also contracted to Master as a servant-death!"

"....."

You're okay with being her boyfriend...?

Moreover, she said it whilst wearing a weirdly triumphant expression.

⁴⁰ A pun lost in translation. Feeling down, or 凹んでる, can also mean 'cave in'. This (in particular 凹, which by itself can be interpreted as concave) then plays on the next line, 凸なのに, as 凸 can be read as the opposite of 凹 (convex), and the fact that 凸 is part of Dekomori's name (凸守). The joke here is that Dekomori, much like her name, should be the opposite of 凹, or in this case feeling down. Interestingly, 凸 by itself, at least when read as でこ (deko), also means forehead.

However, I had to be firm here.

“See, in my case, being her contractee – it means being her fiancé.”

“Yikes, it’s a one person bacouple⁴¹-death!”

“.....”

I was told by middle school student that I was a one person bacouple.

Well, it is true that I haven’t promised Rikka that I’d marry her, so in that sense it wasn’t inaccurate to call me a one person bacouple...

But then again, what exactly is a one person bacouple?

Isn’t that just an idiot?

“Maybe the rotten commoner isn’t aware of this, but to be someone’s fiancé, don’t you need an engagement ring-death? And since you don’t have one, you must not be her fiancé-death!”

“No, well... yeah, you’re right. Still, you shouldn’t really be saying to someone that they’re something like a “rotten commoner”.”

“Eh? Fine then – Rot! You commoner!”

“The imperative form!? Dekomori, you don’t call your friends or acquaintances things like “rotten commoner”, do you?”

“Hmph... of course not-death. Dekomori is a solitary warrior-death, and so any подруга⁴² that Dekomori has opened her heart to will be called by an appropriate name-death.”

“Подруга...?”

“Kepupu! Don’t you know what that means-death? Looks like in the end, you’re merely just a Dark Flame Master!”

“You still haven’t corrected the way you laugh... Shouldn’t you have already fixed it by now...?”

Still, I had a much better impression of her now, since she had stopped calling me a rotten commoner and had instead started to call me by my actual alias.

⁴¹ This was an awkward line to translate. In the original line, the phrase “一人バカカップル” was used, which when translated literally means “one person idiot couple”. The term バカカップル itself is a portmanteau of the words バカ (idiot) and カップル (couple), and refers to a couple that’s either too stupid when it comes to romance or too romantic for their own good. I couldn’t figure out a good way of phrasing the notion of a ‘bacouple’ in this and the following lines, so I left it as-is.

⁴² Russian for a female friend.

I'm not sure if I should call that part of her earnest, or thoughtful.

"Oh! It seems that the curse is still effective-death...! As expected, you really are Dekomori's rival-death! Dekomori will guard Master-death! And then for Dekomori, Master will... Ge-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh!"

"Wait, what's with the yuri⁴³-like statements every now and then!?"

"Huh? It's not like that-death! Dekomori just really respects and admires Master-death! The Dark Flame Master might not understand-death, but to Dekomori Master is a being that Dekomori wants to call onee-sama-death!"

Dekomori's face was full of resentment as she spoke fervently. And thus, a new fact was discovered.

Dekomori was really, really fond Rikka.

"Onee-sama, let's use that! On that note, 'yes, well thought!' Say that as a reply! Dekomori has always wanted to try something like this at least once!

"Yes, well thought."

And in the very instant I said that line as a joke – Dekomori's weapon, what she coins the Mjölnir Hammer, made a crushing blow on my stomach. "Uwaaaaaaa!" is what I would scream if I had to scream what was currently going through my mind.

The blow was so strong that I stopped breathing for a moment.

"SUPER INAZUMA ATTACK-DEAAATH!⁴⁴"

"Indeed, that attack's offensive ability was..."

After hitting me, Dekomori then perfectly replicated the trademarked pose.

She was quite the able girl.

"Returning back to the previous topic, about calling Master Onee-sama – 'That is not my name,' is what Master said, and so Dekomori calls Master Master-death."

"O-oh... is that so?"

...Since Rikka was quite popular among girls, I get somewhat suspicious when I hear statements like that.

Even the reserved Kazari-chan seemed to fancy Rikka a lot.

Now that I think about it – I don't have any male rivals, do I?

⁴³ Slang for girls' love.

⁴⁴ From the line of "Onee-sama, let's use that!", to "SUPER INAZUMA ATTACK-DEATH!", Dekomori and Yuuta are referring to the scene in the series *Gunbuster* in which the protagonists use the Super Inazuma Kick.

“Well, when Dekomori inevitably marries Master, Dekomori will be sure to invite you too-death. So just give up-death.”

“‘Just give up’ huh... However, I’d never hand Rikka over!”

“It’s futile-death. According to Dekomori’s sources, first loves are doomed to fail-death!”

“That’s not something that a middle school girl should say! And something like that’s not the case at all!”

“Hah, there are no falsehoods written in the Mabinogion-death!”

“Ma-mabinogion?”

This girl, what on earth was she talking about?

As expected of someone currently suffering from chuunibyou, from time to time she begins to start talking nonsense.

Up till just then, we were having, at least in my opinion, a more or less normal conversation. Now, however, I was failing to keep pace with her train of thought.

“DEATH!⁴⁵”

“Not to say that I understood the meaning behind your words, but what’s the reasoning behind your conduct just now!?”

Please don’t suddenly jump and scream out loud again.

It generally startles the other person. To do it so abruptly makes it seem as if you had picked a fight with them.

“Dekomori was just that surprised-death. That the Dark Flame Master was still incapable of comprehending what both Dekomori’s and his own settings were-death.”

“Don’t say something that harsh so modestly. But, well, somehow, I do get what you’re trying to say. When you say setting, it’s like your position, right? When I was entering high school, I too wondered what my position in the class should be.”

Although, in the end – I ended up being a low-profile sort of character.

Right now, my position is ‘Rikka’s boyfriend’. My presence was so weak that a term like ‘Rikka-chan’s boyfriend’ epitomised the entirety of who I was.

“Kepupu! The ‘Dark’ in Dark Flame Master seems to mean having a faint presence-death! Perhaps you should change your name to ‘Faint Flame Master’-death!”

“Hey, my presence is actually... a little stronger than that...”

⁴⁵ Capitalised and in English in the original text.

I mean, you're laughing way too much about it. And you still haven't fixed the way you laugh.

Is laughing like that part of your setting or something? Laugh properly.

"Ge-heh-heh-heh-heh, it seems that the faint shadow poison is still works-death...! As expected, its effect of reducing you to nothing but a faint shadow lasts for a long time-death!"

"My name's gradually becoming worse and worse! Listen, my –"

"Reality, be rent! Synapse, break!"

"Listen to me about my name! ...And as for what you said just now, that was something that Rikka had also been saying lately."

"Death! It's Dekomori's secret technique-death! Its effect is –"

"...Eh? Effect?"

"By the way, for some reason Master says that there is an aspect of the Dark Flame Master that lives up to the name of Demon King-death – whereabouts is that evil persona-death? As far as Dekomori can tell, you're someone feeble-death."

"Oi, tell me about its effect. And, well... about me being the Demon King, don't worry about it. I no longer have that kind of power anymore."

"What, so in the end you really were just a small fry compared to Dekomori-death! Geheheh, dea~th!"

"Ha! It was an afterimage!"

Evading the sudden attack from the Mjölnir Hammer (for some reason, my wonderful intuition was telling me I was about to be hit), I struck Dekomori on her small head lightly.

As a result of having avoided both her attack and her stupidity, Dekomori groaned in frustration.

"You, you harmed Dekomori-death. Could it be that you actually were still the Demon King-death? No, must be it-death. Master must have had talked about you being the Demon King because Dekomori had been deceived by you-death! Well, Dekomori has her goddamn eye on you now! As long as Dekomori is Master's servant, Dekomori will turn Dark Flame Master's life into finely minced spring onions over the course of three days!"

"What the hell it is that you are trying to say!?"

"Well."

And with that, Dekomori stopped talking.

It was likely that she got so worked up that it was just her enthusiasm talking, and so she had no idea what it was that she was trying to say.

“The play, so that at best, you’re not doing something like getting in Master’s way – do your best-death.”

“Don’t try to forcibly bring an end the previous conversation! And, huh? How do you know about the play?”

“Death, it’s because Dekomori had communicated via telepathy with Master just the other day-death.”

“.....”

To not just say something like you called her over the phone: as expected of a patient.

“Oh, thanks, I’ll be sure to keep doing my best. Oh, right, the play will be on next Saturday, and so if you’re interested Dekomori, please come and watch. If you do come, well in that case I’ll be sure to treat you to something.”

“There was no need for Dark Flame Master to ask Dekomori to come – of course Dekomori planned on coming-death. Ah, are you still going to properly treat Dekomori out to something-death?”

Dekomori looked up at me with only her eyes, which emphasised the fact that her eyes were getting teary.

Seeing this part of her reminded me that in the end, she really was just someone a year level below me; a middle school student who stretched her back and stood on her tiptoes to make herself look taller.

I do seem to recall hearing that her family was ridiculously wealthy though...

Still, this felt sort of nostalgic.

It kind of reminds me of the time when I first met Rikka.

An underclassman to me both in terms of being a chuunibyou patient, and in terms of actual age.

To be honest, she kind of feels like another younger sister to me.

“I got it, I got it. I’ll still treat you out to something proper.”

“Ge-heh-heh, it appears even the Dark Flame Master can occasionally be nice-death. However, don’t forget-death. Dekomori and Dark Flame Master are beings that can never co-exist together-death! Nothing but death to those who love Master!”

“...Yeah, yeah.”

What a thing to say with a triumphant expression.

I mean, didn’t you also love Rikka? Well, it wasn’t like I could say anything in response about it, since I too could understand that sort of feeling.

“The contract has been established too – well then, since Dekomori must return soon to the battlefield as she is a warrior, here is where we part ways-death.”

“That setting... I like it. Oh, see you.”

After sticking her tongue out at me, Dekomori turned her back towards me and started to make her way back.

Not to the battlefield, but to her own house.

As I looked at her small back, I thought to myself that even she too could get embarrassed, and that I should too should keep doing my best.

Tomorrow's the cultural festival.

Chapter 8: Cultural Festival Day 1

9 AM.

With the principal broadcasting “Hooray! Cultural festival! It begins~!” in his usual light-hearted tone, the curtains on the cultural festival were raised.

As the cultural festival started, festivities occurred in the most literal sense.

Outside our classroom, you could hear the boisterous voices of the people from the other classes. It seems that they were fully enjoying the start of the cultural festival.

Although we would have liked to also take part in and enjoy the festivities, the reality was that right now, our class couldn’t afford to do so.

The timing was perfect for us: the cultural festival had just started, and things were about to get much livelier.

At such a time, it was going to be our class’ big moment – our class program, our class dance, was scheduled to occur.

Our class was busy making our final preparations.



It was now 9:45. 15 minutes to go before the performance.

And with our performance just before us, we, class 1-2, on the second floor – gathered in front of multi-purpose hall.

The boys were holding onto the props needed to set the stage. The girls, having already changed into their outfits, were waiting on standby.

Currently, a second-year class was performing their class play in the multi-purpose hall. The play had just reached its climax – both laughter and the voices of people calling out the names of the performing students could be heard frequently from the hall.

Although part of it was due to the turnout at the venue, it was quite obvious that even before we had gathered in front of the multi-purpose hall, our class had grown increasingly nervous.

Given that the boys were only tasked with sound and lighting, there wasn’t that sense of nervousness among us. For the girls, however, things could not be more different. Every single one of the girls had a serious expression on their faces.

Whilst making their final checks on the choreography, the girls, among other things, chatted and moved their bodies in an attempt to reduce their sense of nervousness. Even so, it was clear that they were still quite tense.

And with our class like that, the door to the multi-purpose hall opened. From the hall came a soft voice.

The voice, which announced, “please get ready to begin making your preparations,” was from a student who was a member of the cultural festival committee.

As a result of that announcement, the atmosphere grew even tenser.

“Alright, let’s huddle!”

The one who gave that a command was Nibutani.

With Nibutani at the centre, the girls formed a circle around her. The boys then formed a circle around the girls.

“There’s no need to be worried – we’ve all practiced quite a lot for this! We’ll entertain the people who have come to watch us, and we’ll enjoy ourselves while we’re at it. Let’s make it so that everyone has a good time!”

After Nibutani spoke those words of encouragement, it appeared that everyone’s nervousness dissipated. Everyone looked rather relieved.

As expected of our class’ leader, the Class King.

She was able to say something so positive so frankly.

As a result of Nibutani’s words, the hearts of everyone in the class was moved: everybody nodded their heads in agreement and began encouraging each other with a soft “let’s do our best”.

“Boys, we’re also counting on you too! Without you guys, there’s no way that this show could be a success!”

Nibutani didn’t forget to show concern for the boys as well. It was a level of attentiveness fitting of the title Class King.

In response, a loud and deep “YEAH!” came from the boys. I too also gave out a nod and let out a small “yeah”. After everyone got fired up, Nibutani’s voice could be heard once more – directing everyone to move to their respective posts. I too would need to start moving to the station for lighting.

But, before that –

“Rikka.”

In response to my voice, Rikka, who was right in front of me, turned around. By the way, when Nibutani told everyone to gather around, I had been able to successfully position myself behind Rikka.

I smiled gently at Rikka, who was visibly startled.

“Yuuta, since when?”

“Huh? I’ve been behind you for a quite a while now... Did you not notice?”

“Ah... For I to have... I guess might be a little nervous... I couldn't read Yuuta's presence... I'm unqualified to be your contractor...”

“Ahaha, that's not true. You were simply focused on what's coming up ahead, so it makes sense that you didn't notice me, right?”

The very instant I said that –

“Yes, yes, yes, Rikka-chan! Right now, the dance is something that's even more important than Yuuta-kun!”

From the side, Kannagi Kazari – also known as the idol of our class, Kazari-chan – hugged Rikka as she chimed in.

“I see – Yes, my lady.”

“Lady!?”

I was astonished by how unexpected that phrase was.

That, that Rikka is being subservient to someone else!?

Although recently she had been getting closer and closer with Kazari-chan as they have been playing together a lot, since when did their relationship with each other get this intimate(?) ...?

Previously, Kazari-chan stated that her declaration of being into yuri was a joke – I was now beginning to think that she was actually being serious, which really worries me.

“Hehehe, right now, Rikka and I are in the middle of using that kind of setting when we play together. Sorry, Yuuta-kun!”

“Oh, no, it's fine, it's just...”

“Ahaha, is it alright with you that we're played together with settings like that before?”

“Eh? ...Playing around like that is normal for you two...?”

What on earth are you two playing...

However, as expected of Kazari-chan – she got Rikka to address her as “lady”.

Not that I had anything perverted in mind, but I'd like to ask her a bit about the trick that she used for future reference.

“Now then, I guess I'll go and head to the stage first. Don't be late, Rikka-chan~.”

After turning towards me and giving me a smirk, Kazari-chan separated herself from Rikka's body and headed towards the hall by herself first.

I guess that she was being considerate in her own way.

It seems that there was nothing but extremely attentive people in my class.

I'm grateful for that consideration of hers.

"Um, Rikka. Do you best; I'll be cheering for you from the above!"

Although it wasn't said very smoothly, I did end up saying everything that I wanted to say properly.

I wanted to pass those words onto her before we started no matter what.

With this, a little bit of her unease should have been wiped away – this was the answer that my pondering came up with.

Even so.

I'm glad – I'm not always able to say what I want to say properly, so when I do say something, I really wanted to be able to say it properly.

Rikka also returned a bashful smile as she responded to my awkward words.

"...Yeah, thanks Yuuta. Witness it – the dance of Devilish Truth Stare."

It seems that Rikka too was embarrassed, as she said all that in a voice that was barely audible before immediately turning around and rushing straight into the hall.

Towards that back of hers, I cheered her on in my mind once more. I then also started to head to where I needed to be.

After using the rear entrance located opposite of the multi-purpose hall's stage to head up to the second floor, I arrived at my station: the place where the spotlight I was in charge of was located. Although there shouldn't be any issues given that I've confirmed how to use it during the dry runs, I should still double-check again where the switch was and how it worked just in case.

Yep, everything worked fine.

...However, it was really warm here.

Unlike when we did the dry runs, thanks to the sheer number of people and the heat from their excitement, the multi-purpose hall was unusually hot.

Although the air-conditioner had been turned on, given the number of people here it didn't seem like it was capable of fulfilling its role of cooling people.

Particularly since I was right next to a lighting device that continuously emitted heat, the heat was especially hard to endure.

To cope with the heat, I first rolled up the hem of my shirt. I then sat down and fanned myself with my hand as I waited for the performance to start.

As I looked down at where the audience was seating from the gaps in the railing, not only did I not see any gaps among the neatly lined folding chairs that were packed full of students, I also saw that there were quite a few people standing behind the seating area who were likely there to watch our performance.

I'm almost certain that somewhere in that crowd was Shichimiya, Amaniji-senpai, and Kumin-senpai.

Everyone was probably waiting in anticipation for our performance to start.

Still, although this venue didn't originally have a large seating capacity to begin with, it seemed that there were far too many people who come to watch our performance.

I suspect that the turnout for our show was equal to the turnout of a performance being held in the gymnasium, which had a large seating capacity. I felt a sense of victory from our turnout.

Since it was dark in the hall, I couldn't see the clock that was located near the stage very well. As such, I took my phone out from my pocket to check the time.

Only 10 minutes left before the performance.

It seemed that I too was getting quite nervous.

I could feel a type of sweat different from the kind that occurred as a result of feeling hot.

And then, right as I thought that –

"It's hot here, isn't it? Ehehe, we've come! Is next to you fine?"

I couldn't see very well due to it being so dark, but even without looking I knew who it was from that 'distinctiveness'.

It was obvious – it was Amaniji-senpai.

As Amaniji-senpai complained "hot hot hot", she rolled up the hem of her shirt a little irritably.

After that, and although I didn't expressively give her permission to do so, she sat down right next to me."

"Why, it's a nice seat, isn't it? A special seat."

"Umm, Amaniji-senpai, why are you here? Or more importantly: you're not involved with the performance, so how did you get up here...?"

"Heh heh, we said, "With lighting~!" and they let us in no issues. We too wanted to watch DevTru Rikka-chan's cute dance from a box seat. Furthermore, Yuu-chan's here too!"

"H-ha..."

Well, and similar to what Amaniji-senpai said, since this place was the highest place that you could see the stage from, it was, in a sense, a box seat.

Expect for the heat, of course.

"As expected, you think we'll that be a nuisance, don't you? We won't disturb you, so please let us stay!"

“Err... normally the line’s “How about if I get in the way I’ll leave?” or something like that though...”

“Ahaha, you’ve made a big mistake if you think that we’d say such an ordinary line!”

“...Yeah, I’m already well aware. It’s fine if you stay, it’s not like you’re hindering me or anything. Although I will be bothered if you start being a nuisance during the show.”

“That is something we absolutely won’t do. Even if – even if it is the normal thing to do,” declared Amaniji-senpai firmly.

I’m guessing that she felt that way since she also was in a similar situation.

Her performance – she wanted to make the play a success. The same as us.

The side profile of her gazing intensely in the direction of the stage revealed just how strongly she felt about it.

“...Yuu-chan, we –”

Suddenly, Amaniji-senpai called out to with a somewhat fragile voice.

Before I could respond, Amaniji-senpai continued on.

“DevTru Rikka-chan and Sofia-chan – we’re quite thankful that we were able to perform our play together with them.”

“What are you saying all of a sudden? We haven’t even performed yet, much less had things come to a close.”

“Ahaha, that is the case, isn’t it? This performance too: good luck.”

With her face directed towards me, Amaniji-senpai looked embarrassed as she muttered out those words.

After she muttered those words out, Amaniji-senpai started to say something else, but her weak-sounding voice cut off the very instant it came out. It was like she was hesitating over what to say next.

Then, as if she had finished choosing her words, Amaniji-senpai spoke slowly.

“...We’d like for Yuu-chan to hear us out for a bit.”



“We’d like to talk a bit more about ourself. ...But it’s likely that we won’t be limiting ourself to just that. Idle gossip – we hope you’ll think of what we’re about to say next as just that.

“Yeah, idle gossip. Ah, but if you didn’t particularly want to hear us out, please feel free to just go ahead and say so.

“Yeah? We’re glad, thank you.

"You know –

"About DevTru Rikka-chan and Sofia-chan, they are those so called chuunibyou, aren't they?

"Ahaha, what? Yuu-chan already thinks that too?

"Heh heh, that's right. But, as expected, they really are chuunibyou, aren't they?

"Hmm. Umm, just the other day – we guess you could say that it was just good timing – we heard that word by chance and wondered what that word meant, and so we looked the word up. When we looked up the word, for some reason the two of them came to mind, and so we wanted to ask you if they were that.

"It was said on TV. A singer said it.

"DevTru Rikka-chan and Sofia-chan: they're classified as having the so-called evil eye type of chuunibyou right? We remember thinking 'we see, we see'. Chuunibyou – the person who came up with the term is amazing. The term was so precise and accurate that it shocked us.

"Do we think they've contracted it – yeah yeah, we got the impression that they were had contracted it.

"Ah, but it's not like we thought that the people like DevTru Rikka were weird or anything like that. Rather, we thought that it was good that they were like that.

"Ahaha, because it's cool, isn't it? Do we have that sort of unusual ability? We've never thought about creating a setting like that and the like, although we do think that something like that would be nice.

"Well, we guess everything that the current us has come up with is kind of like our setting.

"That's right, if we think about it carefully, the way we refer to ourself in the first person is also something you could say is our setting.

"So does that mean we too also have chuunibyou?

"Ahaha, is that so? Yay~!

"Yeah? We guess we're feeling a little happy. We feel special.

"Hmm, were we not meant to have such symptoms? We've only heard of the word for the first time recently after all.

"We wonder if we are the so-called subculture type?

"For ourself to be different from others – we wonder if that was exactly how we were feeling. We would do stuff like to produce abnormal, try show off our uniqueness, try to become special, pretend to be an outlaw, and misunderstand what was fashionable.

"Oh, you're asking about that? Asking about our casual clothes?

“No, we’ll speak freely! Our casual clothes are... ‘Hideri-chan’s casual clothes are no good at all,’ is what Kumin, with a smile on her face, said about them!

“By now words like that make us very happy! Still, since she said, “I won’t play with the causally clothed Hideri-chan,” our casual clothes have been sealed away. And so that’s why we’re always in uniform. But well, look: don’t you feel that the uniform is special?

“It’s special if you think of it as clothes that can only be worn for three years.

“Right? But well, right now it’s normal to be wearing it, so we were still troubled by it. Although that’s why we remodelled it. Our uniform’s different from everyone else’s – good idea, right?

“It’s fine that DevTru Rikka-chan and Sofia-chan did it too. We like it. Although we didn’t want to feel a sense of camaraderie over it or anything, to be frank we were happy that they had a similar idea.

“Although the only reason why we personally think that it’s a wonderful thing is because we think they’re cool.

“Though in our case, it was to “produce abnormal”.

“Because – we wanted to be different from everyone else.

“Heh heh, that’s right, that’s right. We are persisting on and doing our best at an extremely strange thing.

“We don’t think that it was a mistake, for us to have put in the effort to try be a special existence. Although people have recently been saying that everybody begins special, we don’t think that’s the case.

“Because it is impossible to begin as the “only one”.

“Since everyone from the beginning – from when they are born, they are not special.

“It would be similar to saying that each and every person is individualistic – we don’t think that that’s the case at all. That is to say, it is a matter of course that everyone is not synonymous with individuality.

“You’re only individualistic only when you display your individuality, right?

“If you don’t use it, it’s the same as not having it.

“That’s why, for us to be such individualistic person – we wished to be a person different from everyone else.

“Ah, Yuu-chan! Since our blouse is see-through, just now you were staring at our rainbow bra, weren’t you!

“Sorry, sorry, it was just a joke, a joke.

“Let’s return back to the main subject now, okay? We might derail from the conversation like that from time to time, so we’d be happy if you’d tolerate us when we do that.

“That’s how our conversations usually are? Ahaha, that’s true!

“Now, to return back to the conversation, what we’re about to say next is what we wanted Yuu-chan to hear – we’ll be telling you about us. A first-person narrative – you’re the first person to hear it, aren’t you?⁴⁶ Since something might come up to interrupt us, we’ll refrain from telling you something so surprising like this.

“...That didn’t come out very well. We take back what we said just now.

“Err, how far did we get up to?

“Right, right, that’s what we wanted you to hear about.

“Last time, we told you the story about us wanting to be different from the people around us, didn’t we?

“Yeah, that’s right. The ‘normal is no good’ story.

“The story about us being treated as a “heretic” by the people around us.

“Last time, we left a little something out – it wasn’t that we had anyone in particular against collectivism.

“Well, but if we were pressed to say whether we were collectivistic, we guess would say that we weren’t.

“To begin with, from back when we were in middle school we were alone by ourself the entire time!

“No no, we’ll say it emphatically! We weren’t collectivistic at all!

“Hmm, as an elementary school student we were also largely by ourself quite often. Our family – it was a little tough.

“It’s already happened, so don’t worry about it, don’t worry about it. It’s something that happens quite frequently, probably.

⁴⁶ An impossible to translate pun to relating 私語り (わたしがた; meaning first-person narrative) and 私語 (しご; which means talking when personal affairs when you don’t have permission to talk, e.g. talking to someone about personal matters whilst someone else is delivering an important speech or talking about personal matters during class). The original pun here is that since she is conflating 私語り with 私語, Amaniji-senpai is saying that she should refrain from continuing with her story since she might end up distracting Yuuta from something important (i.e the dance). This would lead to the next line, where she retracts the pun since it didn’t come out too well. Since there isn’t an equivalent term in English for 私語, I’ve taken some liberties with the dialogue here instead.

“Yuu-chan too – affairs are no good, okay?”

“Yeah, that’s right. Relax, relax.

“If we were on the verge of doing the same thing as someone else would we still do it, you ask? We don’t know about you, but as for us, we think that it’s impossible to do the same thing as someone else if it was something special. At any rate, if we had no choice but to do the same thing as someone else, it would be quite the fortuitous occurrence, wouldn’t it?”

“That was, we guess, why we didn’t have any friends.

“Did you not understand much of what we just said, Yuu-chan?”

“Well, that’s why, as we saw it as staying alive by killing your own individuality, we got frustrated with people who conformed with their surroundings and became ‘normal’.

“Well, but that wasn’t exactly “normal”, was it?

“We’ve said it quite a few times already, but there’s no need for you to worry about the us back then.

“Well, we aren’t really sensitive to things like that, right? That’s how we ended up seldom starting a conversation with others.

“Kumin was a miracle. Well, it was also miraculous that we got to know Yuu-chan, right?

“After all, had we never also spoken to Yuu-chan back then none of this would be happening right now – right? That’s why it was a miracle.

“About Kumin? The story of us meeting is something we’ve remember quite well. Since for some reason, Kumin came and greeted us! In spite of the fact that we were conspicuously dressed back then and just about never greeted anyone.

“Ahaha, damn, you’ve got me! Yeah, there was also the fact that we thought that anyone who greeted someone that appeared hard to approach was a little specialish.

“Oh, but back to the main topic!

“About Kumin, when we saw her full name, it was like a lightbulb went off in our head. See, us and Kumin, we have quite peculiar surnames, right?

“And, although our name’s “dry weather” and “rainbow” were contrary to each other, the surname of Tsuyuri, or rather “rainy season”, had the meaning of “praying for rain”, meaning our compatibility was perfect! Look, after successfully praying for rain it changes the

sky of a dry day to have a rainbow hanging across the sky, doesn't it?⁴⁷ We had compatible names! And like how our names were compatible, so was the way she begins a conversation with me, and so we got long quite well.

"Not only were our names compatible, but our compatibility in another aspect also matched.

"Kumin's also a rather eccentric child, right? From our perspective, she wasn't just not normal, she was amazing. Whereas our eccentricness was cultivated, hers was completely natural.

"Also – you know, we were also simply happy that someone greeted us.

"Eh? Ah, the way we call her? We call her 'Kumin' since Kumin's a great name, isn't it? From the beginning, we thought that her name was great and not normal.

"Well, something like that happened, and so us and Kumin became friends. If we were to say it like DevTru Rikka-chan would, would it be "Discerning Eye of Distinctiveness activate! Compatibility is perfect!" or something like that?

"Ah, we see, resonance! What a great phrase, it's perfect!

"That too is chuunibyou? Hmm, there are all sorts of ways of expressing chuunibyou, isn't there?

"And so, well, that was how we had been living out our life, although at times we also did think about our situation.

"For instance, when the time comes for us to enter society – 'how will we be treated?' were the sort of thoughts that come to mind.

"Although society demands individuality, for people to not just follow the crowd – it seems to reject those who have too much individuality as well. If we had to say which side we fell under, we would likely be on the side that gets rejected.

"It's a harsh place, isn't it? The "present" us had too much individuality.

"However, we didn't think that that was bad: we even legitimately like that things were like that. We always wanted to be more "special" than everyone else.

"Ahaha, we mean we are unmistakably us, aren't we! To hear you say something like that makes us happy.

"However, as for whether we had ever felt uneasy about it – yeah, we had.

⁴⁷ A pun involving both their names, 天虹旱 (Amaniji Hideri) and つゆり (Tsuyuri). As for Amaniji's name, she breaks it into 天 (sky) 虹 (rainbow) and 旱 (dry weather). As for Kumin's name, she reads the first two syllables of Tsuyuri as 梅雨, meaning rainy season. Amaniji then links the rainy season with 'praying for rain', leading to her conclusion of hot day + rain = rainbow.

“We thought to ourself, ‘Is this really okay?’ and ‘Is it really fine for us to stay like this?’ After all, we were in fact – a “heretic”.

Like Jeanne d’Arc? Ahaha, maybe. We are a virgin after all.

“Oi, Yuu-chan, what are you making us say!

“Well, we were the one who said it out loud. Oops.

“But isn’t it Yuu-chan’s fault that we said something weird? And for blowing away our anxiety, too.

“No, seriously, it’s true.

“Our anxiety’s vanished.

“Although it was a short period of time, our week of activities together – during that time, we watched DevTru Rikka-chan and Sofia-chan.

“Those two – we’ve said it before previously, but those two were a bit unusual. They were able to do things that were not normal as if it were normal. They lived as they pleased, and yet they managed to properly maintain their own belief in who they were, all the while also having fun with everything.

“DevTru Rikka-chan, the first time we met, when we approached her so abruptly, she followed our lead and adlibbed along with us. Despite being shy, she went along with us – she demonstrated for us a lot of her skills. In karaoke, making clothes, and gaming. In addition, she made a display of her flirting.

“Ahaha, it’s true that that detail was irrelevant!

“We’ve been able to receive so much energy from Sofia-chan. That girl’s amazing, isn’t she: she’s always spirited. In addition, that scarf. To be frank, we don’t think that we could win against that scarf. After all, it’s been so hot!

“Honestly, they are amazing. Maybe they think that we’re normal... We experienced a bit of a crisis thinking that they potentially think of us as normal.

“Something like that isn’t true? Ahaha, it’s quite heartening to have Yuu-chan tell me that. Yuu-chan knows the two of them quite well after all.

“Well, and so that’s why–

“That trying to be unique, trying to be different from everyone else is not a mistake – that chuunibyou is not a bad thing – is what we think when we see two.

“And so that’s why we feel grateful.

“Not only to those two, but also immensely towards Yuu-chan as well. Seriously, thank you.

“Ahaha, we’re also grateful to them, and so naturally we’ll be properly saying our thanks to those two as well!

"This, we wanted to say no matter what.

"For us to remain us – it's seriously thanks to the efforts of everyone that we're okay with remaining like this forever!

"Right, right! It's a declaration by us stating that we'll always be "special" via "heresy"!

"...But, honestly, it's a little strange how we've able to say just about anything to Yuu-chan.

"Even to our outrageous story, you properly listened to it. You're kind. Too kind.

"Ah, but as an upperclassman who's your senior by one year, we should be giving you advice, shouldn't we?

"Advice... although we guess you could also call it our concern.

"As a result of needing to study how to be different from other people, as well as having employed it a lot due to us being a loner, human observation has become one of our strong points. And Yuu-chan – Yuu-chan's a bit too kind.

"We probably shouldn't be the one saying this since we've taken advantage of Yuu-chan's kindness, but...

"Nevertheless, allow us to say it – the only person that should become accustomed to Yuu-chan's kindness is Yuu-chan's "special person".

"For someone like us, when we saw the three of you together, we understood. The kind of relationship that the three of likely had with each other. Kumin – we wonder if she was aware of it?

"At one point, we too thought that Yuu-chan's kindness a strong point. But being kind is different from being affectionate.

"We also understand as we too wanted to be special to someone – that wanting to be special to someone also meant wanting to not just be someone normal to them.

"That's why, Yuu-chan's kindness, it's – it's too kind, and perhaps even poisonous.

"Ah, sorry, sorry! Don't get so down like that! Just think of it as a bunch of strange words from a strange person, or something like that!

"What part of you are we talking about? Let's see, guess it's like your "lack of awareness"?

"Well, it's not like we're saying that a girl's heart will unravel for you because of it or anything, but – because Yuu-chan's too kind, we thought that it would be for the better for to be aware of your own kindness.

"It'll be fine it'll be fine! As long as Yuu-chan doesn't mistake "being affectionate" with "being kind" then there's no problem!

"Yep, since it's Yuu-chan, things will definitely be fine!

“Well then, let's continue the conversation as if we never had given such strange advice!

“Err, since it wasn't like you wanted normal advice, right?

“Eh!? N-n-normal!?

“U-understood, there will be an adhérence to normal!

“No, it's something that we eventually will have to do after all... Just kidding!

“Well, but, since Yuu-chan truly is a kind person, we think that being a counsellor will suit you! Especially since you're also good at listening to stories too!

“The work of a counsellor does appear to be quite tough though.

“Eh, you're interested in our love life?

“We love girls!

“We are not just saying that to play up being abnormal!

“Well, but, if we were to fall in love with a boy – we would be “normal”. That's what we think. And that's – that's a little scary.

“And so that's why we, without a doubt, will never fall in love with a boy.

“In that sense, we think that DevTru Rikka-chan's truly amazing.

“In the end – guess that even with chuunibyou, she wanted to be in love?

“Eh, we're getting complimented? Yay~!

“Ahaha, Yuu-chan too: you're truly weird, aren't you? You're quite the peculiar person. However, you conceal that weird and distinct part of you, don't you? There's no need for you to hide that part of you though.

“It's a compliment. A wonderful compliment. To have been able to speak with Yuu-chan –we're glad that we met you, really. That's what we honestly think.

“Yep, that's why.

“Thank you.

“Ah, it appears that the dance is about to start!”



And with that, Amaniji-senpai's story – her first-person narrative came to a close⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ Same untranslatable 私語り / 私語 pun as above.

Since it was so abrupt, I was a little bewildered when it ended – however, that I was able to hear from Amaniji-senpai once again about the reasons as to why she continues to be eccentric made me quite happy.

To continue being eccentric, to keep remaining special – or to borrow a little from the way Amaniji-senpai puts it, to continue having chuunibyou.

Chuunibyou is not something bad – was what she essentially was saying.

That view on chuunibyou, which recently had become my stance on the matter, was something that I had learnt from Rikka too, and as such I could relate quite well to the things that Amaniji-senpai was saying.

It made me think all over again that chuunibyou wasn't a bad thing to have.

While it was a little surprising to hear Amaniji-senpai declare that she had the subculture type of chuunibyou – it wasn't like that was an issue or anything.

After all, Amaniji-senpai will surely continue to act in a way that is expected of her by everyone.

A thing that, without a doubt, was a terribly difficult thing to do.

I wanted to keep thinking about Amaniji-senpai's story for a little while longer, but I also needed to concentrate at my task at hand.

After saying "Oh, there!", Amaniji-senpai, who was next to me, seemed to have hopped up from her seat. As if it were responding to her movements, the level of enthusiasm in the venue also instantly heated up: cheers reverberated through the venue.

I too also got up and directed my gaze to the still dark stage. From the silhouettes, I could tell that the starting group of dancers were already on stage.

Shortly, an announcement announcing the start of the dance was played.

"Thank you for your patience. Now then, this is class 1-2's dance show. Everyone, please give them a warm welcome."

The applause given was so big that I thought it was never going to end.

I wonder if we were expecting that much of an applause – was what I happily thought.

I too began to make my preparations regarding the lighting at my own pace.

The key thing is to light the centre spot. Confirming the cue to start. Then, during the show, my job is to turn the light on and off. To move the light appropriately, create the atmosphere, and so on.

...Yep, all good.

I've reviewed what I had to do: all that's left is to wait for the music to start.

Suddenly –

“The cultural festival has already started, and by tomorrow it will have come to a close,” was what the person standing next to me, Amaniji-senpai, muttered.

As soon as she finished saying those words, a short “boom” intro music, which was the cue to start, was played. Before long, an up-tempo track started to play.

The first and most important task, to turn on the light when the cue to start came, ended with no issues.

The light’s destination was the starting group of dancers: centred around Nibutani and the dance club members, the group’s eight members performed an original dance.

Not only was the dance a skilful, stylish, and enchanting dance-club-like dance, the outfits were also cool and uniform.

A black vest over a monochrome checkered shirt.

Paired with fashionable shorts, soft hats, and fastened neckties. What they wore was so stylish that you were also able to also enjoy this as a fashion show.

Well, the fact that the outfit was stylish was just my opinion though.

However, in regard to the dance, it wasn’t just me – every member of the audience, regardless of gender, appeared mesmerised by the impeccable dance. Even the teachers appeared captivated by it.

And in the centre position, dancing like mad with very flashy turns and jumps, was the person who will be the dance club’s next president and was seemingly the club’s ace, Nibutani.

It was a perfect start. Completely flawless.

I’m certain that Nibutani, who was also the show’s organiser, was extremely delighted by this.

And once the music ends, the dancers of the first group will then need to exit the stage via the wings.

It was here that the lights are darkened once again. My second task.

Since up next are the members of the erotic group, the ambience is very important.

The music too had just changed to a seductive (?) melody.

With the lead of the group and our idol, Kazari-chan, positioned in the centre, the group gave an inviting glance to the audience as they started to dance.

The dance itself too was also loaded with sex appeal: it was a coquettish dance.

Naturally, the costumes too, of course, were quite revealing! There was nothing covering the legs at all! Their navels were on full display!

I'm almost certain that the men watching were like the then me and were completely full of vigour.

After all, the very instant that the erotic group appeared on stage, I was able to hear many deep masculine voices cry out. It was so loud that you could tell that the boys were extremely delighted.

And the girls were happy that the dancers were enjoying themselves and having fun!

...Was what I thought to myself as I watched the dance from the second floor.

Again, the level of excitement in the venue became even higher as the second group's dance came to a close.

And then, with the stage being completely illuminated once again – it was what I've been waiting for, the third group!

The group that Rikka was a part of – the idol dance group.

So that anyone could enjoy it, a j-pop song that everyone knew played as the group started to dance.

Garnished with Rikka in the centre, the cute dance got the crowd going wild.

Naturally, the outfits were cute too. Contrary to what Rikka usually wears, they were bright, fancy outfits with no hint of blackness at all. If I had to compare the outfits with something, it would be the image of an angel.

Dressed in a Sweet Lolita-ish outfit that was an angel-like white adorned with light pink frills, the group fluttered across the stage lightly.

My spotlight was shining on Rikka quite brightly. The light from my spotlight was concentrated on that single point.

"Wow! DevTru Rikka-chan's super cute~"

It seemed that Amaniji-senpai was watching Rikka as well. She was ecstatic.

...Naturally, I was too.

It was like I was seeing my own daughter raise her hand during class observation day. "Do your best, do your best!" was what I cheered in my heart.

Once the music ended, everybody came back onstage again. The final dance was a dance that involved everyone.

That dance, the one that everyone practiced so hard for – their performance gave off the impression that they've practiced more than enough for it.

It was truly beautiful – everyone was completely in sync with each other as they danced.

The dance was drawing everyone present in. It was impossible to look away – everyone was bewitched.

And now with the music all finished, class 1-2's program has safely come to a close.

– It was a great success.

It wasn't arrogant for me to say something like that, given how large the applause we received was.

Upon receiving that applause, the student council member in charge of the area walked towards Nibutani, who was standing at the centre of the stage, from the wings and handed over a mic so that Nibutani could give the audience one final message.

"Everyone, thank you so much for watching!"

Nibutani's face was full of sweat, yet she continued without wiping her sweat off.

"We too also had a lot of fun, being able to dance for you all!"

Seeking agreement, Nibutani turned to the rest of the girls of our class.

However, even before she could fully turn her head around – one after the other, the girls voiced their agreement with Nibutani.

Seeing that response, even though she had not yet heard everyone's response, the fact that everyone was in agreement caused Nibutani to turn back around once again. She had a very satisfied smile on her face.

"The cultural festival has only just begun! Everyone, make sure to enjoy the rest of the festival as well! That's all from us!"

Her final remarks served as a cue for everyone onstage to bow.

The venue was once again filled by a big applause.



"It's finally over. DevTru Rikka-chan was super cute!"

"Right? Phew, I'm glad it finished without incident."

Since the lights were switched off, it was dark inside the venue once again.

We needed to leave this place fast, as the next group was probably making their preparations for their program.

"Amanij-senpai, since the next group's here, let's get down from here."

"Yeah, sure."

And so, the two of us made our way towards the exit in the dark.

Near the lights, there was a cord that acted as a railing. I wondered if Amaniji-senpai was okay, and so I turned my head around and looked back. Amaniji-senpai's steps looked rather unsteady.

That was pretty worrying... If she fell from here, it would be quite the serious injury – call it me being meddlesome, but as soon as that thought crossed my mind, I couldn't help but offer her my hand.

"Amaniji-senpai, is your footing alright? Please be careful, alright? From here it's the stairs. Your hand – I'll hold it on our way down..."

"Hm? Ah, it's fine. We can see properly. There's no need for you to worry so much. Still, how gentlemanly of you, Yuu-chan."

"It would be quite the serious injury if you fell, right? And so, your hand..."

"....."

"Err...?"

"...Sorry, we refuse to hold hands here since that's the normal to do, Yuu-chan! We've good. Thanks for the offer though."

...Hmm, it was probably since I worry about her all the time that I got worried, but I guess this time was just me being a little too worried.

Without taking my hand, Amaniji-senpai, after carefully checking each step, made her way down the stairs.

There wasn't anybody from my class present as I exited the multi-purpose hall. I'm guessing that the girls had already made their way to the changing room.

Instead, what I found in front of the multi-purpose hall was a sea of people discussing their thoughts on our class' dance.

It was mainly their opinions on Kazari-chan's group that people were talking about.

The first group was quite good too – said a female voice.

Although I didn't hear much about Rikka's group, since I was hearing nothing but good reviews, it made me, even though I didn't dance, quite happy.

Then, as if to replace the previous crowd, the people who have come to watch the next program poured into the venue in droves.

"Well, that was fun!" said Amaniji-senpai, who was late in exiting the venue, as she stretched.

...To hear such unreserved praise from my upperclassman also made me happy, but in a different way from before.

Although the praise wasn't directed at me, hearing it still made me feel a little embarrassed.

“Now then – now that we’ve had our fun with that, where to next?”

“Huh? You’re leaving already?”

“Yep. We’re off to search for something else that’s interesting.”

“...By yourself?”

“Well, yeah. Since apparently, Kumin has some stuff to do for her class. To start off with, we’ll be alone by ourself for now.”

...Alone, huh.

Hmm... Is there even anything I can do?

Still, as expected I couldn’t help but say something.

“Um, if you’d like, we could go around the festival together? We’ll be joined by Rikka, of course.”

“Ahaha, no no, it’s fine. Wouldn’t it be better if it were just you and DevTru Rikka-chan going around the festival together? We’d just be getting in the way of you two.”

“Something like that wouldn’t be the case at all though...”

“No no, and besides, we do feel like wandering around by ourself for a bit. After all, there are numerous other plays also being performed at the festival, and our play is in competition with them all! It sort of feels like we’re scouting out the enemy. Well then, if you do see us around, make sure to say hi, okay?”

As she said that, and without waiting for my response, Amaniji-senpai waved both of her hands at me as she walked into the crowd.

Somehow, I made her worry about me again.

Naturally, I was feeling quite bad about it.

Since I assumed that Rikka probably wouldn’t have minded, I didn’t think that Amaniji-senpai joining us would be an issue at all. Then again, it was also quite possible that Amaniji-senpai joining us wouldn’t have gone over well with Rikka. If I were in Amaniji-senpai’s position, I too would have definitely refused.

– ...Or more precisely.

Perhaps this was that part of me that was “lacking in awareness”.

“That being too kind can also be poisonous – was it?”

As I muttered that to myself, I took out my cellphone and opened the messaging screen.

I scrolled down to the ‘other’ line of my address book.

† User of the Devilish Truth Stare, Rikka Takanashi †

As I scrolled over her name, my hand stopped for a bit.

I once again recalled the things that Amaniji-senpai had said just a short while ago.

That I was unaware of how others perceived my kindness.

She pointed that part of me out to me, so naturally it was on my mind.

– That being too kind could also be poisonous.

The meaning of those words.

Judging by the way Amaniji-senpai talked about it, it seemed that what she was saying had an element of truth to it.

I got the impression that she was seriously worried for me when she said all that.

I may not have understood what she was talking about yet.

But that's why.

More and more. I'll need to keep thinking about it.

Properly, as her contractor.

And – as her boyfriend.

As I vowed in my mind to continue contemplating about it, I sent a text.

To my girlfriend, a girl who still continues to be afflicted with chuunibyou – to Rikka.



Woohoo~! A cultural festival with Rikka~!

...Was how I currently was feeling. Although I was by myself, I was extremely excited (naturally, I had not forgotten what I had just vowed to myself).

However, reality was not so kind.

Life did not seem to go the way I wanted.

After I texted her, I met up with Rikka in class 1-2's homeroom. However, that huge evil (at least in my eyes right now) known as Kazari-chan came along with her to thwart me. My plan to go around the cultural festival with Rikka collapsed.

In addition, Kazari-chan was holding hands with Rikka as if they were super close with each other.

"Eh heh heh, sorry, Yuuta-kun. Rikka-chan's mine for today~. She promised me earlier to spend today with me~."

"Hmm... But since there was a promise, I guess it can't be helped..."

Apparently, it seemed like this time, she wasn't going to be considerate.

Then again, it wasn't like I had made a promise with Rikka to go around together...

I was under the impression that we did have a promise given that the two of us were in resonance, or rather able to understand each other without words, but it seemed that was truly just wishful thinking on my part.

Knowing that it would have all gone as planned if I had made the promise with Rikka to go around with her made me a tad regretful.

"Yuuta, let's go around the cultural festival together tomorrow."

"Ahh, I'm being consoled by Rikka..."

In order to console me, Rikka stood on her toes in order to stroke my head.

Was I really feeling that miserable just now...?

It was quite the shock.

"Still, recently I've been worried that Kazari-chan is a lesbian, and is seriously aiming for Rikka..."

"Oh oh oh? Yuuta-kun, there are many grounds⁴⁹ to that false accusation!"

"It's because of lines like that that I think there's truth behind that sentiment!"

The phrase is no grounds!

"Well, well, well, please rest assured! Not worry do, not worry do, not worry do⁵⁰. After all, it'll just be two girls playing around having a good time!"

"It seems that messing up all those 'do not worry' wasn't just a big mistake on your part..."

"Yuuta, relax. My lady and I are simply tied together by an eternal connection."

Kazari-chan grinned as she heard Rikka say those words.

It seems that she found it very funny. It was as if she was saying 'hilarious!' or something in her heart.

Still, for it to be spreading... I wonder if Nibutani will lose her mind again if she learns of this...

⁴⁹ In the original line, Kazari is mixing the phrase 事実無根, which means groundless/unfounded, and 事実無限, which literally translated roughly means 'infinite truths'.

⁵⁰ Once again, Kazari is mixing up the phrase. Instead of saying 大丈夫 (which means don't worry), Kazari is saying 大丈夫 (which does not mean anything) three times in a row instead.

“Right right right, it’s since the two of us have an eternal connection with each other! Then, Yuuta-kun, I’ll be borrowing Rikka-chan now, okay? See you around!”

“Yuuta, later!”

And with that, the two of them left the classroom while holding each others’ hands intimately.

I was left in the classroom by myself, all alone.

Although the classrooms not being used for the cultural festival and were, for the time being, being treated as rest areas, since the cultural festival had only just begun, as well as the fact that it was still wasn’t noon yet, there was no sign of anyone returning to the classroom.

Currently, the classroom was just a desolated place for people to leave their bags.

The fact that I was alone by myself during the cultural festival made me truly⁵¹ sad.

Ah.

That’s right, there’s him⁵². To distract me from this inexpressible sense of emotional turmoil, I pulled out my cellphone from my pocket and called my close friend, Isshiki.

Two seconds later.

“Oh, Togashi. What is it, I’m busy right now.”

“With what?”

“Naturally, I’m keeping tabs on the various costumes that the girls have changed into.”

...As expected of him. Or rather, how unwavering of him.

It was great that that aspect of him was so serious, but, well...

“I was wondering if you’d like to go around the cultural festival with me.”

“Hmm? You’re not going around with Takanashi-san?”

“She was stolen by Kazari-chan.”

“Hmm. I see, that’s disappointing to hear. “Sure!” is what I’d like to say, but... sorry. The truth is, I’m occupied right now.”

Isshiki lowered his voice. It seems that he was being occupied by something meaningful.

⁵¹ A pun lost in translation. The kanji for truly, 真に, is pronounced as makotoni, which plays on Isshiki Makoto’s name.

⁵² Another pun lost in translation, playing as the same concepts as the previous pun. まこと, an archaic term for “that’s right (in the sense of recalling forgotten information)”, is also pronounced as makoto.

"Just now, I was undercover by myself at a place that could be called the staple of the cultural festival, a maid café, to investigate the costumes, but a m-maid started talking to me. A, a girl's talking to me!"

Since Isshiki suddenly lowered his voice, I thought that something had happened and was worried for him...

Well, but since this was Isshiki, something major may have happened. I could picture him acting all suspicious.

"I see, right. Got it, good luck with chatting with the maids!"

"I'm glad to hear that from you, Togashi! Thanks for supporting me! Anyway, if I do manage to get a polaroid with a maid, I'll make sure to show it to you!"

"Wow~, I'm looking forward to it~."

You're probably not going to be able to get one though.

"Anyway, I'd appreciate it if you'd give me a call again when I'm free."

"Sure, got it."

With my call in vain, I returned my cellphone back to my pocket.

Well, since my close friend was levelling up, it was my duty as a friend to support Isshiki and to give up on having him accompany me.

Now then, what now?

The cultural festival – to be alone during it was lonelier than I imagined. Or rather than lonelier, perhaps it would be better to say that it was harsher than I imagined.

A person that was fine with being by themselves – did not exist.

Back when I was in middle school, although I said stuff like "Hmph, the festival miasma has hit the humans" while having a defiant attitude when the cultural festival hit, and would go off and play by myself... Despite appearances, the me back then was still lonely...

Ah, if only someone could save me from my loneliness – the very instant I thought that, the cellphone that I had just placed in my pocket began to vibrate.

I once again took the cellphone from my pocket – it was a phone call.

...It was the real deal! A hero who would come to save you if you prayed for help in your heart!

"Oh, Hero? Right now, it's my shift, and so if you're free –"

"Coming coming! I'm on my way!"

Just as Shichimiya was saying the "fr" part of "free", I already answered back with, "Coming coming!"

Then, and without listening to the rest of what Shichimiya had to say, I told her, “I’m on my way!” and hung up. I then immediately started to dash. To hell with it, if it meant being able to run a little on this day, I was even willing to disobey the instructions of the members of the disciplinary council.

The time it took for me to start dashing – was about 3 seconds.

Before I was even able to think about it, I began moving on reflex.

“Just how lonely was I feeling...” was what I thought as I ran, which made me a little sad, but I was okay with it.

I was fine with getting teary over ordinary happiness.

Scrambling through the crowd of people inside the school building, I made my way towards where Shichimiya’s parfait stall was at a fast pace.

I’m glad that I checked where it was in advance. I arrived at the first floor in no time at all.

On the first floor, near the home economics room – located in the building next to the regular school building, where all the special classrooms were – there were many food-related programs set up next to each other in a line. And in this section was class 1-3’s program – a parfait shop.

Their program was even branded ‘Parfait Shop’ – the signboard had the words ‘Parfait Shop’ written on it.

It seemed that you could eat in the tent where the food was made. I could see several people here and there inside the tent who looked like customers.

Although I didn’t get the impression that business was booming, thanks to the people inside the tent who looked extremely satisfied eating their parfait, many of the people passing by stopped by the shop to buy a parfait before they moved on, eating their parfait as they walked.

And just like Shichimiya said, she was working there as a shop assistant.

There stood my hero, Shichimiya – to my surprise, her hair was not in her usual Twin Ring Style. Instead, her hair was in a ponytail.

I didn’t have a fascination with ponytails or anything (of the two, I prefer twintails more), but I was mesmerised by how fresh that hairstyle looked on Shichimiya.

To borrow from the way Shichimiya phrases things as of late: her hair was “looking good, OK~☆”.

Likewise, her outfit was not her usual Demon Duchess-like attire. It may have been since she was feeling hot, but she was wearing a casual t-shirt with a skirt. Combined with an apron, this costume of hers also felt fresh.

As my mind was occupied with thoughts like that, Shichimiya came up to me.

"Ah, Hero! Huh, you're alone?"

Looking happy to see me, Shichimiya, whose cheeks were somewhat red, waved her hand at me to greet me.

That gesture of hers was so cute that it made me gulp without thinking.

"O-oh. Yeah, I'm alone for now."

"Where's Rikka-chan?"

"She's been kidnapped by the hidden boss Kazari-chan."

"Nyahaha, Rikka-chan's a girl who's kidnapped quite often, isn't she?"

It was a little awkward to hear Shichimiya say something like that.

Oh oops, I'm not implying that Shichimiya's a kidnapper or anything.

"Well, since it's just Hero, it'll be my treat! Now, now, what would you like?"

"There's no need, it's fine. I'll pay for myself."

"No, no, it's fine. I've made you come all this way, so it's only fair, right ☆?"

Saying that, Shichimiya forcefully pushed my back and directed me towards an empty seat.

I mean, if you're going to put it like that, then I guess I'll take advantage of your kind offer then.

"Excuse me, two chocolate banana parfaits please!"

After telling that to the people in the kitchen making the parfaits, Shichimiya then sat down in the seat in front of me.

Wait, what? The seat in front of me?

"Is this okay? Don't you have your work as a shop assistant?"

"Yeah, I've already informed the rest of the class that I'll be taking a break once Hero arrived."

Oh...?

H-how moving. I'm touched. I'm so happy that she had arranged all this for me!

She's now a kindred spirit of mine! Who is this Isshiki person? My best friend's Shichimiya!

...Well, us being the best of friends was a long time ago. Even so, I haven't really been treating Shichimiya in a way that close friend should be treated.

"Shichimiya! If there's anything I'm able to do for you, just say it! No matter what the request is, I'll do it!"

“Eh? What’s gotten into you, Hero!?”

“...Well, look, I’d feel quite bad if I just had you treat me without doing anything for you in return.”

“By just treating you to something, Hero becomes my underling who’d do anything for me! Don’t, Hero – after all, you’re able to collect money even from enemies who don’t even have any money on them by refining them into money.”

“I don’t think I’d accept that sort of money, even if it was the reward money from triumphing over the last boss... Well, I mean, regardless, I’m still indebted to you for a variety of things. For instance, I still owe you for you agreeing for me to introduce you to Amaniji-senpai, right?”

“Hmm, but from my end, I was delighted that you thought to invite me to help out.”

“Don’t say something like that, please! I’ll do anything to make it up to you!”

I was pleading to her with my hands put together. Somehow, I ended up in this strange position.

Shichimiya too seemed to have realised how strange this was and replied to me in a hurry.

“Huh!? Was I being mean to Hero or something!? Hmm, understood. I’ll think about it☆.”

“Yeah, just let me know whenever you think of something!”

“...That promise – although I wasn’t aware of it at that time, it was to bring about a disaster –”

“Eh!? Wait, what!? The thing that you were planning on having me to do is going to be something like that!?”

“Nyahahaha, I’m joking, joking. I’ll think of something for my request before long – ah, there’s that. ...Yeah, that would be perfect. My request is that you’d allow to ask you about something for a bit.”

“To ask me something?”

“Yeah, to ask you something. Is there a problem?”

“No, but there wasn’t a need for you to be so modest – feel free to ask me anything. I’ll answer whatever question you have to the best of my ability.”

In response to my words, Shichimiya muttered, “Nyahaha, it feels wonderful to know that even secrets aren’t off-limits☆,” with a bashful reaction.

Although I didn’t mean for it to go that far, it wasn’t like I had anything to hide from Shichimiya. In fact, since Shichimiya is already knows pretty much everything about the past me, I had no intention of hiding anything from her at this late hour.

“Umm.”

After saying that, Shichimiya paused for a brief moment, before continuing,

“During summer vacation – you went to the beach, didn’t you? Why did you not invite me?”

As she said that, it may have just been my imagination, but Shichimiya’s face – no, it wasn’t just my imagination. With each breath, Shichimiya’s cheeks got more and more puffed up until eventually, she had a completely sullen look on her face.

Her cheeks had swelled up like an angered pufferfish.

It was an expression that was rare for Shichimiya.

“...No, that... Wait, huh? How did you know about that?”

“Eh? Didn’t you go with Mori-sama and her friends? Mori-sama carelessly let that fact slip from her mouth. And then after that, she kept avoiding the topic!”

“A-ah...”

By the way, about what Shichimiya was talking about.

No, we didn’t actually go together to the beach as a group.

Rather, when Rikka and I went to the sea for a date during summer vacation, we happened to run into Nibutani and her group of friends.

Guess you could say that I was out of luck running across Nibutani and her friends, as, sure enough, I was toyed with by Nibutani. Although I intended for it to just be the two of us having fun on the beach, for some reason it ended up being a group session with Nibutani’s group (Shinka, Chinatsu, and Natsuno were known collectively together as the Summer Trio), meaning that our outing was no longer a date.

Well, but since I still had a good time, it was still a good memory for me.

I wonder if Shichimiya had misunderstood what happened... That she thought she was the only one that wasn’t invited.

Hmm... I was having trouble figuring out how to reply to her, since something like that wasn’t the case at all. After a short while, and as I was still at a loss as to how I should be replying to her, Shichimiya, who was still pouting, opened her mouth,

“I-if everyone is going out to have fun, I would like to be invited to come along as well.”

“Ah, yeah. Of course! Ah, and it’s a misunderstanding, a misunderstanding. We only met up with Nibutani by chance – Rikka and I didn’t plan to go to the beach together with her.”

“Eh? Ah, is that so? So that’s what it was... What a relief.”

“Exactly, and you’re definitely invited if we’re going out to play with everyone.”

“Really? Hmm, I’m definitely invited~☆.”

Shichimiya appeared happy as she laughed, “Nyahaha”.

Phew... Somehow or other, it seems the misunderstanding was resolved.

It seemed that as the two of us were chit-chatting, our parfaits were steadily being made (of course it was), as the new shop assistant – she was probably Shichimiya’s replacement – carried over two parfaits to our table.

Two chocolate banana parfaits that gave the impression here and there of being sloppily plated.

Although this place was indeed just a stall at a cultural festival, contrary to expectations the parfait looked extremely tasty.

Since I didn't want the icecream at the top to melt, I began eating my parfait immediately.

“Yum, this is delicious! However, there’s a bit of a strange flavour to it. That flavouring, what is it?”

“Heh heh, as expected of Hero. The poison didn’t work –”

“There’s poison in it!?”

“A lie, a lie, it’s just a secret ingredient. As to what the ingredient is, that’s a trade secret~.”

...I’m worried.

Well, if Shichimiya really did poison it, the poison was doing its job, as the parfait was so delicious that I finished it all off.

It was the same for Shichimiya as well – she finished everything off as well.

“Regardless of what that secret ingredient was, the parfait itself was extremely delicious. Thanks for the meal.”

“There’s no need for thanks. By the way, Hero, what are you planning on doing after this?”

“Let’s see... I guess for now, it would be to wander around the culture festival alone. How about you, Shichimiya?”

“I see. Since I’m on my break right now, after this it’ll be back to work for me. If it was the case that I was free, I would have joined Hero’s party. Sorry!”

“I’m the one that should be feeling a little bad... Not only did you treat me out to something, you even spent your break time with me.”

“No, I was glad that you came! Thanks for coming~☆. Now then, it’s time for me to carry out the duties of the Magical Demon Duchness.”

“Oh, good luck! If you become free again, please contact me. I’ll come over to hang out.”

“Nyahaha, roger☆.”

As Shichimiya said that, she had a very happy cherubic smile on her face.

From that smile alone – that feeling of loneliness of knowing that I’ll be by myself after this was blown away.

After having waved goodbye to Shichimiya, who was returning back to work, I too also left the place that we were sitting at.

Now then, where should I head to alone next?



Person. Person. Person. Person. Person. Person. Person.

The school building was overflowing with so many people, it got to the point where I thought that the school itself was a person.

Since I could see quite a few people wearing casual clothes, I’m assuming that a lot of former students and family had come.

The school building too was completely different from usual – the classrooms were decorated with multicoloured ornaments. Many of the ornaments were so elaborately made that just walking pass and looking at them was enough to make you feel happy.

In the midst of such a disorderly and crowded place I was alone – walking slowly through the building while looking at the list of programs written in the pamphlet.

Where would be somewhere interesting to visit – as I thought that, I had a quick glance at the list in the pamphlet. Everything on the list seemed quite interesting to me: they were all things I wanted to visit. As I was, for the time being, a member of the Eccentric Drama Club, I wanted to see the other plays. Plays such as “Katsudon Girl” and “Meow VS Meow” caught my eye.

In addition, some of the more major attractions such as the maid café, the Manga Research Club’s manga, and the Astronomy Club’s planetarium also seemed like it would be quite enjoyable. I also wanted to conquer all the food stalls, and to enjoy myself with festival games such as the shooting gallery.

I would be doing it all alone, though.

Damn... As expected, as soon as I thought that, I felt a sense of emptiness.

Then again, I guess that it was inevitable that I’d feel like that.

And with thoughts like that in my mind, I continued on. For the time being, I headed to the closest place for me to warm myself up – a classroom which had “Baseball” cutely written on the sign.

For some reason, the interior of the classroom was decorated very prettily. However, as I expected, the program here was Struck Out⁵³.

Struck Out – a game where there were targets with the numbers 1 to 9 written on them, and where the goal is to hit each of the targets in succession with a ball.

Naturally, I would not have come here if I did not have any confidence in myself.

Heh heh heh, why back when I was alone in middle school, I devoted myself to creating a miracle pitch⁵⁴!

...Not that I was a baseball boy or anything.

As I was moved to the Struck Out line that was the least crowded of the three – a voice called out to me.

“Ah! Yuu-chan! Did you come to visit me?”

Looking over to the source of the voice – it was Kumin-senpai, who was dressed in a bright red uniform.

In addition, her headgear and her megaphone were also red – she had the complete set.

Since this was the first time that I’ve come across her without for initially being asleep, I was a little astonished.

“H-Hello. No, it’s just a coincidence that I’m here – I just came here to enjoy myself for a bit...”

“Is that so? I see, but even so I’m still happy. It sort of feels like fate, doesn’t it?”

.....

To have words like that said to them whilst being gazed at intensely would make any guy feel completely bewildered...

What destructive power this upperclassman of mine has...!

“Ah – err, it seems that senpai, uh, really like baseball, right?”

⁵³ A game in Japanese where targets are arranged on a board from 1-9, and a ball is thrown (or kicked) to kick the targets.

⁵⁴ An idiom related to baseball that is rather Japan-specific. This term generally refers to a pitch that is literally impossible to do, such as a ball changing trajectories at sharp angles in the middle of being thrown, or a ball disappearing after being thrown. This term is also used as a metaphor for pitches that are near-impossible to return.

“Yeah, I love it! It’s my dream to be displayed on the back screen of Mazda Stadium!”

“That sounds just like you but how would you even achieve something like that!?”

Ignoring my retort, Kumin-senpai happily swung around the megaphone she had in her hand.

That non-athletic swing of hers was also quite cute.

““That’s amazing, Kumin – how did you do that?” If I was asked that, I would reply by saying it was just a swing that any regular fan would be able to do.”

“If it was a swing that any regular fan could do, would it really get projected onto the back screen...?”

“Well, more importantly, I’d like to see Yuu-chan’s pitch as soon as possible. Here, this is the ball. Since the ball is soft, it’s okay to throw it with all your might.”

As Kumin-senpai said that, she deftly handed a ball over to me. It seemed that Kumin-senpai was quite agile.

Hmm... Okay.

Since Kumin-senpai was watching as well, I’ll need to display a good performance.

In my mind, it was a live broadcast. My life... I’ll burn it all⁵⁵!

Togashi Yuuta – His first pitch, he’s winding up – and it’s thrown!

The ball flew straight – and as luck would have it, it hit the target marked ‘5’ (dead in the centre), which was approximately five metres away.

In my mind, I fist pumped!

“Ooh. Yuu-chan did it.”

“No, that... I just got lucky, it wasn’t intentional.”

“You were lucky: I see, it was just the ball⁵⁶. Alright, next ball~.”

...I wonder if it had become popular to say the word “just” with a smug face.

Before I could make a relevant retort again, a ball was once again handed over to me deftly.

Unfortunately, however, it seemed that my good luck was limited to only my first pitch.

⁵⁵ Nichijou reference. [命を燃やせ!](#)

⁵⁶ Untranslatable pun. In the sentence before, Yuuta says that he got lucky, 「...たまたまですよ、たまたま」. Kumin in this line makes a pun by linking たま(tama) of たまたま to 球(tama), which means ball.

Aside from my first pitch, the rest of my pitches pretty much all wildly missed the target. In my mind, I teared up! Where did all my self-confidence from before we go!

“Ah, that’s too bad. With pitches like that, it looks like the Yuu-chan won’t be experiencing the pro baseball chapter of his life.”

“But never in my life have I considered something like going pro in baseball!?”

To begin with, I hadn’t even imagined myself as a high school baseball player.

Just what sort of person did you think I am, Kumin-senpai...

“But, you do still get a consolation prize. Here’s your ‘blowy thing’.”

“Blowy thing!?”

“Huh? Did you want something else instead? There’s also the slappy thing? And, there’s also the bangy thing too.”

“...The blowy thing is fine...”

Or rather, the way you described those prizes was way too literal.

I had no idea of what any of the prizes were at all.

Ah, but except for that, I guess... It’s an aside, but the official name for the blowy thing is party horn.

“With this, Yuu-chan’s cultural festival will feel even more festive, yay!”

“Well, I guess this thing could be considered a festival-like prize. This blowy thing.”

“Ahaha, it suits you quite well, Yuu-chan. By the way, it’s been bothering me – are you by yourself, Yuu-chan?”

“Yeah, it seems that everyone else is a little busy with other things right now.”

“I see; for the time being, I too am busy with being the person on duty here today. If I were free, I would have liked to go around the cultural festival with Hideri-chan and Yuu-chan.”

“Ahaha, it makes me really glad that you feel that way.”

“I’m sorry that I can’t do anything more for you. Still, thanks for coming. Since nobody I knew had come, I was feeling a little lonely.”

“In that case, I’ll make sure to direct Amaniji-senpai and Rikka here if I come across them again.”

“Really? Gee, thanks~. Well then, I’ll be waiting then~.”

As she said that, Kumin-senpai had a smile that was even more cheerful than her usual bright smile.

From that smile alone – that feeling of loneliness of knowing that I’ll be by myself after this was once again blown away.

After being sent off by Kumin-senpai, I left the place.

Now, where to next?



“If I walked around properly for a bit, I would be able to join up with someone else before long.” With that thought in mind, and with the tapioca juice that I brought from the Cooking Club’s stall, I watched many plays and visited various food stalls to pass the time.

No matter what play I watched, I found myself having a good time. All the plays I watched, in my eyes, were full of passion and were very interesting.

In particular, I couldn’t stop thinking about “Katsudon Girl”. It was a masterpiece that moved my heart with things like the thoughts of the lead katsudon.

I hope tomorrow, our play could be just as moving.

The food at the stalls were nothing but delicious. Not only were there the parfaits from Shichimiya’s place, but there was also the superb brownie from the Cooking Club that I brought just a while back, as well as the delicious takoyaki that I brought from one of the stalls. When I join up with Rikka, I’d like to come back to the stalls once again and try everything.

Which brings us to the present. I was currently at the very back of a crowd, listening to a band’s live outdoor performance. It was very good.

Even though I was by myself, my excitement was rising.

However.

I still had yet to see someone I knew. What’s this? Perhaps I’m one of those “impossible sights⁵⁷”.

Since there were so many people, it may have been the case that we just passed by and missed each other. If that really was the case, it’d be better to just use my cellphone to get in touch with someone – at that moment, when my unease started to overflow.

“Ah~, it’s Rikka-chan’s boyfriend~.”

“It’s true, it is Rikka-chan’s boyfriend. And he’s by himself.”

“Wow, he really is by himself.”

⁵⁷ The preceding sentence, as well as this sentence, forms part of an untranslatable pun. The original lines, 「何コレ。もしかして俺が珍百景なのだろうか。」, is meant to reference the TV show 『ナニコレ珍百景』: a show which that shows unusual/rare scenes such as [an uncrossable bridge](#) (何 in katakana is ナニ).

I didn't know if it was since I was their acquaintance, or if it was since they were the sort of people who abused those enjoying the cultural festival by themselves, but over flew their voices from behind.

Although there was no need to turn around, as it was quite obvious as to whom those voices belonged to, I still turned towards the direction of the voices.

The Summer Trio was standing behind me whilst eating delicious-looking crepes.

As the three of them looked at me: one had eyes full of disinterest, one had eyes full of bemusement, and one had eyes full of pity. All three of them looked at me differently – none of their gazes were particularly kind.

"Wh-what about it? I'm not particularly I-lonely or anything."

"Heh heh."

In response to my bluff, Miyoshi smiled as if she saw through it. It was a somewhat wicked smile.

"It's fine. You can tell the truth. After all, we played together during summer vacation, right? If you're lonely, you could join us?"

"Hey hey, don't tempt another person's boyfriend. More importantly, you're trying to get him to treat you to something just like he did the other day, aren't you? I think it's time you quit."

"Noo, it's not like thaaat."

"Darn it~, I wanted to get treated to something today as well~. Like the time we went to the sea, that was great~."

.....

...Miyoshi-san's scary!

More important, back then, did this person think that I was just some thing for her to use to eat delicious things!? How scary – or rather, how unbelievable.

Although it seemed that I avoided her trap this time, nevertheless I understood that she was a dangerous woman. From now on, I'll have to be careful. And I'll need to inform Isshiki of this too. Perhaps he's already been ensnared.

"I mean, Rikka-chan's boyfriend belongs to Rikka-chan, right?"

"No, well, I mean, that's right, but..."

"See. And so that's why, treat us?"

"How did you end up with that conclusion!?"

Where's the connection between the two!?

Her way with words was scary. As well as her devilish smile.

I even began to say, “But well, sure, fine.”

“Tch, how disappointing. Still, if you’d like, you could join us? Shinka would be delighted, right?”

“Eh!?”

The voice came from the startled Nibutani.

It looked like her half-eaten crepe was about to spill out from her mouth as a result of her surprise, but it seemed that she barely managed to avoid that outcome.

“Eh, wa-wait a minute, Natsuno. What are you saying all of a sudden!?”

“Huh? It’s since among all the boys, Shinka seems to have the most fun chatting with Rikka-chan’s boyfriend.”

“Hah!? No way no way, that with Ge-geruzoni, hey!?”

How unusual. The sight of Nibutani acting all flustered.

Is this the sort of position Nibutani occupies among the three of them? This is of great interest to me.

“Oh~? So it’s like that, Shinka~? I didn’t notice it at all~.”

“That’s not it at all!! Geruzoni is... that, drop dead!”

“Recently, hasn’t the way that you talk about me been really crude!?”

I don’t think that the Nibutani of a few months ago would have said things like “drop dead” to me...

Rather, I would expect that her to say something that felt more sadistic.

Well, if it’s true that Nibutani enjoyed talking with me, I know that it must be since she enjoyed toying with me. I’ll properly explain that to them.

“No, see, it doesn’t have to be me in particular. I’m sure that as long as it’s someone she can toy with, she’ll be satisfied.”

“Th-that’s right! It just so happens that Geruzoni is the type of person that’s easy to toy with.”

Hmm, although Sasa looked convinced, it was obvious that Miyoshi was still sceptical.

Sigh. Somehow or other, I knew what Nibutani wanted to say.

That our past as ex-chuunibyou patients was the only thing we had in common!

“Hmm, well, if Shinka says so, then I guess I’m fine with that explanation.”

“Yes yes, that’s how it is. Well then, let’s go! The three of us will be still going around the cultural festival together, right?”

“Hmm~, I’m going to go get something to drink for a bit. See you around~, Rikka-chan’s boyfriend~,” said Sasa in one fell swoop to finish the conversation, before disappearing into the middle of the bustling crowd.

Before chasing after Sasa, Miyoshi, for a moment, turned towards me,

“Hehe, well see you around, Rikka-chan’s boyfriend. From here on out, please take good care of Shinka,”

and said all that before trotting away to follow Sasa.

Leaving Nibutani – the laggard Nibutani-san, behind.

“Hah... Hey Geruzoni, you didn’t take what happened just now seriously, did you?”

“Not at all... Rather, are you fine with not following them?”

“It’s already settled that I’ll be following them, no? But, well – if you truly were lonely by yourself, we could go around the cultural festival together?”

Said Nibutani with a haughty attitude.

And as always, Nibutani had her usual – no, she was wearing a smile that was even more sadistic than usual.

From that smile alone – it made me feel that I could handle even being alone by myself from here on out.

Seeing her off, we waved, “see you later”, to each other. Nibutani then disappeared into the crowd.

Right.

As expected, I immediately became lonely, and so I sent Rikka the text “I’m lonely so let me join you!” and joined up with Rikka and Kazari-chan (thank goodness). After that, we then joined up with Shichimiya, before joining up with Kumin-senpai and Amaniji-senpai a little while later. Together, we enjoyed the first day of the cultural festival to its fullest.

As for the performance tomorrow –

Chapter 9: Cultural Festival Day 2

“As you might expect of someone doing something like this for the first time, I, the Magical Demon Duchess, am nervous! Hero, I think that you should deliver a one-liner to make this place feel more relaxing, but what do you think?”

“Me too... I’m also nervous, so something like that’s a bit...”

“Yuuta, the power of the Devilish Truth Stare is invoked – as your contractor, I order you, the Black Prince, to bring about the blessing of smiles to this place!”

“That’s too unreasonable of a request!”

It was already the second day of the cultural festival.

And, it was now ten minutes before the planned start time our guerrilla play.

Completely impromptu. Today was the only shot we had at it.

It was now 12:20.

Lunchtime – the only time where there was no other play being performed either in the multi-purpose hall or gymnasium.

The place that we planned to perform our guerrilla play at was the open space in front of the school building. The place with the most foot traffic.

There was a lot of people gathered near the sports ground right now, as there was currently an outdoor concert going on. It was very convenient for us.

Since the play ends the instant someone stops us.

I have no idea as to whether we’ll be able to perform to the very end.

To be honest, it would be quite unrealistic for us to be able to do so, but since we’ve decided to perform the play, I wanted to see it through to the end.

And so, right now – we were currently on standby in the storeroom of the gymnasium, which was located to the side of the sports ground.

Since the costumes were nothing but flashy, we were currently staying hidden there so that we weren’t caught.

In the midst of such a dark and cramped space – seeing us whisper our little skit to each other, our two upperclassmen smiled and giggled.

“Ahaha, naturally we too are also nervous as it’s both completely impromptu and our only shot at it, so it’s great that you three reduced our level of nervousness by making us laugh.”

“Mm-hmm, that’s right. It really did help me out a lot. Me too, I’m suuuuper nervous, look.”

As if to say “Listen to the beat of my heart!”, Kumin-senpai arched the upper half of her body. It emphasised her chest quite a bit... Of course, I didn’t go and put my ear to her chest, as I didn’t think that it was appropriate for me to do. Rikka, however, took the initiative to move in and listen.

How envious – thoughts like that did not pop into my mind.

“Oooh! The sound of your heart, wow.”

“See, I’m just as nervous as Rikka-chan. But, everyone will be fine. Somehow or other, we’ll manage.”

To calm our growing sense of nervousness, Kumin-senpai encouraged us in a gentle tone.

“Although Kumin had stolen what we wanted to say, just now we too were also planning on saying something normal like that. Yeah, it really helped us out a lot.”

“Yeah yeah.”

“Oh right, is everyone’s costume fine? Since we’ll all be moving around a lot during the performance, it would be good to scrupulously check that our costumes can handle that sort of movement.”

As directed to by Amaniji-senpai, I checked my own costume very carefully.

Unlike the so-called standard prince clothes – I was wearing my usual finger gloves on both hands, as my character had been bestowed the enigmatic Dark Flame Master setting.

With a black mantle (borrowed from Shichimiya; one that she used to use), a mysterious silver chain, and a sword on my back, the look of prince that was in the midst of suffering from chuunibyou, if I may say so myself, had been completed.

His catchphrase was, “you burned?⁵⁸”.

Yep, as for me, it didn’t seem like there were any issues.

“No problems with me either.”

It seemed like pre-transformation Rikka also didn’t have any major problems with her costume.

Although Rikka’s Eyepatch Cinderella was quite the novel addition to the setting, her maid uniform, which looked like it had been treated like a ragged dust cloth, screamed with fighting spirit.

It was a filthy-looking plain maid uniform that had tears every here and there. The magical transformation of this Cinderella’s appearance is likely to be this production’s high

⁵⁸ A reference to *The King of Fighters* character Kusanagi Kyou. The joke is that Yuuta right now is dressed similarly to him, leading to Yuuta ‘borrowing’ one of his catchphrase.

point. When I think about it in those terms, I can't help but feel that only Rikka could pull off this Cinderella.

It seems that Amaniji-senpai's casting was spot on.

"This scarf, it isn't weird, right?" said Shichimiya in her quite Shichimiya-like Witch Queen costume – or more precisely, she didn't look like a witch at all.

There wasn't even a trace of the stereotypical robed-witch that you usually see. Instead, she had a perfect magical girl costume on – it was her previous school's uniform that had been remodelled with double layered frills to look even more magical girl-like.

Along with a black scarf, she also had a mysterious stick (marvellous!⁵⁹) that she had purchased from somewhere.

For better or for worse, as it was impossible to definitely see her as an evil witch, her costume stood out so much to the point where in terms of costumes alone it overshadowed the lead role.

In fact, the costume was rather protagonist-like. It was quite the Shichimiya-like costume.

"Yeah, it's fine~. Is my costume okay?"

It appeared that Kumin-senpai too had been checking her own costume, as she was moving and jumping about.

Her costume didn't seem to be lacking in that regard, but... While her simple light blue designer one-piece dress did look quite clean, her costume didn't match the image of a queen that I had in my mind.

In addition, as expected, Kumin-senpai's childlike physical features also seemed to add to the "what the heck is this role meant to be" feeling.

Well, I'm sure that her acting will be able to offset that uncanny feeling.

"Alright, it looks like everyone's good."

The Emperor – Amaniji-senpai was overwhelmingly vivid in colour.

If I had to describe how she looked in words, I would say that she was dazzling – as if she wasn't vivid enough already, her brightly coloured costume further enveloped Amaniji-senpai with a last boss-grade presence. Not that she was an enemy or anything.

As per the stage directions, her hair too was tied together in an emperor-like way. ...Not that I had any idea what an emperor-like hairstyle was.

⁵⁹ Untranslatable pun. The original, ステッキ (素敵!), plays on the fact that stick (ステッキ, sutekki) is pronounced the same way as marvellous, or 素敵.

After everyone had finished checking their costumes, we then checked that we had our small trinkets, which made a lot of noise.

Nothing had been overlooked. Nor was there anything wrong.

We were all set.

Now that everyone had finished checking their costumes, Amaniji-senpai called out to Kumin-senpai in a soft whisper.

“Kumin, this is our final one – we look forward to working with you.”

...Huh? R-right! Everyone, this will be the first and last guerrilla play! Let’s all do our best!”

Immediately after everyone nodded in agreement to Kumin-senpai’s rallying cry, Amaniji-senpai suddenly stretched out her left hand.

Although no words were exchanged – we all tacitly understood it meant “We’re counting on you” and placed our hands on the back of Amaniji-senpai’s outstretched hand one by one.

It was clear from our overlapped hands that everyone was nervous.

However, this warmth from our overlapped hands was pleasant.

Having yet to stop smiling since some time ago – Kumin-senpai.

Although not the leading actress, having a level of enthusiasm seeping from her face as if she were the lead – Shichimiya.

Having previously said that she was looking forward to today – Rikka was giving off a remarkable lustre.

And – the one with the stiffest expression out of all of us here, Amaniji-senpai.

Everyone’s eyes met with each other’s.

“Let’s have some fun!”

The one who announced that last bit in stiff voice was Amaniji-senpai.

In response, everyone vigorously raised their hand whilst shouting “Yeah!”.

Nibutani and Kazari-chan.

Isshiki, and the rest of our classmates as well. They probably all come over to watch our play.

Moreover, since today’s Saturday, I’m expecting that my sisters will be coming over to watch as well.

Although I’ve yet to catch sight of her, I’m sure that Dekomori will come too.

And – ...Catgirl-senpai will surely be watching us as well.

Alright then, let's go.

Now is the Eccentric Drama Club's final time on stage – the curtains have been raised.

The time was now 12:30.

Everyone travelled to the open space in front of the school building together.

At the same time that the five of us flashy-dressed people gathered at the centre of the open space –

"The Eccentric Drama Club's! Guerilla play! 'Princess☆Ashes'! Begins now!"

Amaniji-senpai roared that out with a raised voice.

There had yet to be a single audience member.



I had expected for something to happen the moment we started.

It should have been a matter of course – after all, we had not been given permission to perform. However, we were fortunate to the extent that no one bothered us about our occupation of this space.

Lunchtime, the open space in front of the school building, and the other event currently happening at the sports ground. As the three overlapped in terms of timing, there was not many people at the open space. At this moment, it could be said that apart from us and our activity, no-one else was using this space.

And, since you could also watch this space from the school building – it was the most visible place.

It was a place that I didn't want to stand out much in...

But there was no choice – the play had already begun.

"Cinderella, Cinderella! Are you here? If you're not, well, then the Emperor⁶⁰ will prostrate!"

"Huh? Prostrate?"

Suddenly, and as if revived from my nightmare, Emperor Amaniji prostrated beautifully.

It was a play that started with a sudden ad-lib. No, it was a play that started with a sudden prostration.

⁶⁰ The same 儂/washi from in chapter 5: a pronoun used by the elderly. Since there isn't an English equivalent, I've changed the dialogue a bit so that it's in 3rd person to reflect the fact that it isn't 'typical' speech.

The play was immediately incomprehensible. Even Queen Kumin appeared surprised by the ad-lib.

“Yes. Father, what is it?”

Princess Rikka, who had been standing right next to me, trotted onto the stage.

Cinderella – since her costume looked like a ragged dust cloth, it was likely easy for the audience to decipher who Rikka was meant to be.

In response to Princess Rikka appearing onstage, Emperor Amaniji stood up in an over-the-top way.

“Ah, there you are. Listen carefully, Cinderella. The neighbouring kingdom’s prince is looking for a bride-to-be.”

“Dear, I don’t think they call it a bride-to-be nowadays. I believe it’s now fiancée.”

...Queen Kumin was able to ad-lib to that!?

Lines like that weren’t in the script at all. And, there was no need to add those lines.

“Ah, is that so? Well, okay. It seems that said prince is holding a martial arts tournament to decide who his fiancée should be. The prize for winning – a lithograph like this.”

Emperor Amniji took out a cracked lithograph from somewhere and raised it above her head.

“That would be the final lithograph, right? And if you collect all seven, your wish will come true, right?”

“That’s right, we Royalty will have three of our wishes come true.”

“As for me, well, let’s see – I think I’ll wish for eternal beauty. “

“Even your mother says so, Cinderella. Also, if you win the tournament, it’d be good for you to take this chance and get married. Will you go?”

As she was suddenly told to get married with no regard to her feelings at all, Princess Rikka initially had a troubled look on her face. However, after realising that she had no real say in the matter, she then nodded to signal her agreement.

“Right, we’re counting on you-mchocho!⁶¹”

And after haven given lines that should not have come out of an emperor’s mouth, Emperor Amaniji and Queen Kumin left the stage. By the way, that part of the play was scripted.

⁶¹ Reference to the character Kotobuki Renji from *Uta no Prince-sama* series. よろしくまっちょっちょ is his way of saying, よろしく, which means nice to meet you/please treat me well/please take care of it (depending on context).

Still, it was here that I first heard the audience laugh.

Although they were still only very few in terms of number, I did see passersby who stopped walking to watch our play.

Undistracted by that laughter – the abandoned Princess Rikka grumbled a soliloquy.

“I too wish to meet with the prince. But, I’m just going to get killed if I go...”

“Don’t cry! Cinderella! Hop!”

“...? You, who are...!?”

“Nyahahaha, I am the Witch Queen, Sofia Ring! The one who rules this world!”

“W-world!?”

“Cinderella! Despite being of noble birth, you’ve been worked so hard to the point where you look like a ragged dust cloth! Do you really not detest that? Don’t you want to get back at them? ...Don’t you want strength?”

“I... I... want strength! Strength is second to none!”

“Those words of yours – I hear them loud and clear!”

And with those words, Witch Shichimiya held her marvellous stick over Princess Rikka.

Although, it was a development that I had absolutely no idea about. There was nothing in the script that even remotely resembled the lines Witch Shichimiya had just said. It was amazing that they were able to ad-lib all the way up to this point.

“Alright, with this sonata you’ll be able to transform. All you need to do is try transforming.”

Princess Rikka took a stance.

“Transform!”

“Tanta-tara-ta-rara-tara-rata-rarara-ra-ra♪”

Witch Shichimiya hummed out loud transformation BGM(?).

As Witch Shichimiya did that, Rikka underwent a transformation – she changed her clothes onstage, live.

Although the transformation was just her taking off her ragged maid costume to show the clothes she was wearing underneath, it was still quite the surreal sight.

But, I didn’t want any other guys to see this sight!

Yet before I knew it, as I could hear a deep “ooh!” coming from the audience, the number of male audience members had increased. It was painful!

Then again, generally speaking, it was tasteless to say something in the middle of a transformation, and so it was impossible for me to voice my criticisms about that stereotypical reaction.

After several seconds, her so-called transformation, which was really just her changing her clothes live, ended. Princess Rikka had been reborn.

Clad in a black attire, it was the birth of Black Cinderella.

“This is... my new power!”

“That’s right! Now, go forth! Show everyone your power! However, that power cannot be used after midnight!”

Roger, Princess Rikka nodded.

As Witch Shichimiya heartedly waved her scarf as she exited the stage, Princess Rikka also moved a short distance to a new position.

The next scene.

After all this time, it was finally my turn to appear on stage. And to make my entrance cool – I waved the black mantle that I had on.

“Mwhahahaha! Welcome to my castle! The Dark Matrial Arts Tournmanet – it seems this lowlife is the next challenger!”

“Are you the Prince?”

“That’s right! The woman who hopes to be my fiancée! I only like strong women! All the previous women that had challenged me have been buried by my flames of darkness! Can you overcome me?”

As I shouted out terrible lines that not even the me in my heyday of suffering from chuunibyou would say – Princess Rikka drew closer to me.

To confront her, I unsheathed the sword on my back.

“I will defeat you. Marry me please!”

As she said a line that was completely incongruent with the current situation at hand, Princess Rikka pulled a dirk from her waist and readied herself for a fight.

Heh... To do battle against her in this form – Rikkaa!

The Dark Flame Master or the Devillish Truth Stare – let us make it clear which of the two is stronger!

...Were not the sort of thoughts that came to my mind. I did feel like it became easier for me to get into the role better, however.

Guess I have no choice but to go beyond this current level of immersion! Since I’d be embarrassed if I were to return to my real self!

“Hyaaaaaa!”

“Haaaaaaa!”

Our swords crossed against one another. Clash, clash – was the sound made not by the sparks flying off our blades as we clashed, but by a section of our audience who were happily banging their hands together.

However, as she was competing against the physical strength of a male, Princess Rikka’s slender body was getting driven back.

“Y-you’re good...!”

“Heh, you burned?”

“Tch! But what about speed!”

Princess Rikka momentarily made a stance with her dirk – she then started to assault me as if she were a raging hurricane.

Moreover, as if spurred on by her assault, cheering could be heard.

I didn’t have the leeway to think thoughts like, “If it were the case that they were, thanks her quick and nimble movements, cheering at the swaying of Rikka’s skirt, I would turn around and call the flames of darkness on them,” as I was on the defensive, with the tip of her blade grazing me many times. Personally, I thought that it was likely that the people watching were bewitched by how beautiful Princess Rikka’s movements were. Even though I was the one facing off against her, my heart was also stolen away by her rapid jet-black – no, light-speed sword dance.

Naturally, the goddess of victory was smiled on the other side.

“Haaaa – Mad Weapon Dance <<Alma Raffica>>!”

“– What!?”

My astonishment came out of my mouth late – the sound of my sword dropping onto the ground happened first.

Although this showdown of ours was completely ad-libbed, it appeared that it was a success, as the audience had gotten extremely lively. The cheering was a fair bit louder than it was moments ago.

“Haa, haa, haa.”

“...I surrender. You are my fiancée.”

Our marriage had been formed.

It was a turbulent development.

“Haha, you truly are the daughter of the Emperor, Cinderella. Congratulations! You are married!”

"Cinderella, the lithograph, quickly!"

While clapping their hands together, the figures of Emperor Amaniji and Queen Kumin appeared onstage as if they had come for a sudden visit. It was undeniable that their entry felt very abrupt, but, well, I guess that couldn't be helped.

The story was now in its final chapter. I handed over the lithograph that I possessed over to Princess Rikka.

"I am glad that I was able to meet a strong woman like you. Lastly – are you prepared? For the Prince's fiery kiss?"

"...Y-yes."

Embracing the body of the blushing Princess Rikka, I gently brought our faces closer together –

As I was on the verge of kissing her, at that time.

Before I knew it, from the ever-increasing audience – like the wind, a person had swooped down onto the stage.

The person in question – who had long and pure white ears on – was a dignified-looking lady.

"Ahahahahahahaha! Well done, Cinderella! You've gathered all seven of the lithographs! However, those lithographs quite literally serve as the foundation for my revival! Hurry up and lend it to me!"

"Who –"

Are you – before I could finish yelling that, that lady had hopped about like a rabbit and snatched the lithographs that Princess Rikka and Emperor Amaniji were holding. I was so dumbfounded by her dynamism that my voice failed to come out. It appeared that Emperor Amaniji and Queen Kumin too were overcome with surprised, as it seemed that they could do nothing but stand still in shock.

"Damn it, it appears I was too late!"

Together with that line, once again another person intruded onto the stage. It was Witch Shichimiya.

"Cinderella! Prince! She is the one who governs the Seven Devil Kings, the Great Devil King! If you don't defeat her here and now, the world... the world will be destroyed...!"

"I see, as expected... she really was the Great Devil King! Prince! ...Let's fight!"

"Ahahahahahahaha! That's right, I am the one and only leader of the Seven Devil Kings, the Great Devil King – Star God Stella Reynolds! Bring it on! Cinderella! Prince!"

No no. No no no.

Is no one else going to say what is needed to be said?

“You, who are youuuuuuuu!”



“Look, your sensei thinks that if you are to do that sort of thing properly, you would, as you might have expected, need to obtain permission first. It was to be a surprise, you say... eh? The principal? The principal had given you proper permission – more or less given you proper permission and so you performed? Well, since it’s not like you had inconvenienced anyone in particular this time, sensei doesn’t want to say too much more about this, but... Still, don’t you think that it’d be dangerous if some other group took this opportunity to also do the same thing? In this world, there’s this word called “escalation”. People who are too different will be resented by others, so please reflect on today properly.”

From opening her mouth until now.

Nana-chan’s stern words spewed forth line after line.

Inside the staff room – looking up at us from the chair she was sitting on as she scolded us, the face that Nana-chan had was one that was more of a serious educator as opposed to one that was red from anger.

I forgot to mention this, but Nana-chan – since she had received complaints from students that her that the way that she spoke was difficult to listen to, she was in the midst of making the way that she spoke more forceful. However, there was still aspects of her old way of speaking that had yet to be discarded.

And so, towards the stern Nana-chan, the six of us – me, Rikka, Shichimiya, Amaniji-senpai, Kumin-senpai, and the person who took part in the spur of the moment – bowed our heads down and apologised, “We’re really sorry...”

Afterwards.

After I yelled, a voice suddenly rang out in the air.

“Oi! A teacher is heading this way! Run away!” someone instructed.

However – it was too late. By the time that our surroundings had made a stir, Nana-chan had already ferociously dashed from the school building to us. And then, when she arrived at what I thought was the centre of our stage – a high-pitched sound rang out from the whistle that had been hanging around her neck, and,

“With this! The curtain has fallen! The continuation – is up to your imagination!”

And with that, our play had come to its forced end.

It seemed that the audience was also unable to comprehend the situation at hand, as I could hear voices saying things like “Eh? It’s over?”, “Is this also part of the play?”, and “Ah, that teacher looks really mad” here and there.

What should we do... As I was thinking that.

“That’s all! The Eccentric Drama Club’s play is now over! Thank you all so much for watching!”

As Amaniji-senpai delivered those remarks to the people watching us, she looked extremely happy - she raised her voice with a smile that looked like it was about to burst, and then concluded with a very deep bow.

The rest of us, too – we were late to follow, but we also bowed.

A sudden interruption had brought our play to a sudden close.

I would be hard-pressed to say that the play ended safely in a success.

And yet.

There was the sound of applause.

It was the first time that I realised just how many people were watching us. The number of people watching wasn’t anything special. Even so – the window of the school building, the stalls, our immediate surroundings; from a variety of places we received a warm response.

“...Yuuta, I’m glad we did this.”

Rikka, who was next to me, muttered out those words with a smile.

If you looked, you could see that Shichimiya was also laughing her usual “I’m enjoying myself” laugh – and Kumin-senpai also looked quite happy.

Ah, so it is – this was nothing but a huge success.

It wasn’t about the contents of the play.

The promise I made to Amaniji-senpai – for there to be no incident, to perform the play, and to more or less see it through to its conclusion – I managed to keep it.

I wonder what that “upperclassman” who wrote this play would have made of this.

What she would have thought of it, I had no idea –although I had no way of ever knowing, I would be happy if she was pleased by this outcome.

“Right, well then, all of you, please come to the staff room for a bit.”

And like that, we were all taken away by Nana-chan.

Which brings us to now.

After we got scolded by Nana-chan, we left the staff room, as it wasn’t like we had anything else to do there.

“Phew.” A sigh of relief leaked out from somewhere.

“Well, nevertheless I still had a great time!”

Said the person whom the sigh of relief came from. With a very pleasant smile.

It was the sudden trespasser – a woman with long pure white ears.

She had physical features that were best summarised by the words “elder sister”, along with loose, fluffy permed hair.

However, it wasn’t that part that was the problem... In the end, it was the bouncing bunny ears that wore that drew all the attention.

Since it was the middle of the cultural festival, I guess it was cosplay or something like that, but...

Since it felt like the bunny ear fits her, it didn’t feel out of place at all.

Still, to wear bunny ears in casual clothing without having it feel out of place was quite the amazing feat...

“You, the final scene is excellent!”

“Err... me...?”

I had a puzzled reaction, as that bunny-eared lady suddenly pointed to me without warning.

It was also quite embarrassing to be praised by someone I did not know... Still, as expected, I didn’t have the ability to ignore the situation at hand.

“Especially that catchphrase! It was super cool! I’m obsessed with it!⁶² It was, ‘you burned?’, right?”

As she said that, she further reduced the distance that was between us. All the while maintaining that grateful smile.

It appeared that this person, even though it was with a person that she had met for the first time, had judged that this narrow amount of space was enough personal space.

Our faces were really close.

“E-err... thanks for the compliment.”

I leaned a short distance back as I replied.

To the point where the amount of personal space I had wasn’t so narrow.

“Aha, you’re embarrassed, you’re embarrassed. And you as well! Your over-the-top acting was great!”

⁶² An untranslatable pun. Kusanagi’s catchphrase, 燃えたる, is pronounced the same way (moetaro) as 萌えたる, which means “to be infatuated with”.

Distancing herself away from me, she drew close to Rikka, who was right next to me.

“Ah... thank you...”

“That time when you changed our clothes live, that was erotic~. My heart also skipped a beat!”

“A... ahh...”

It seemed that Rikka was embarrassed, as it appeared that she had looked down to conceal her pink face.

Or rather: as expected, it was erotic after all, the changing of her clothes! Shit, I should have interrupted!

“And you as well! It was an excellent ad-lib! Thanks to it, I was able to make my entrance as the Great Devil King! You have my gratitude! Let’s shake hands!”

The bunny-eared lady abruptly requested to shake hands with Shichimiya.

“Sure☆. I too am glad that I was able to put on a good performance!”

As expected of Shichimiya – unlike us two, she was able to keep her calm and respond with a handshake to someone she did not even know.

Yep, good.

After giving praise to us first years and leaving that comment indicating her satisfaction behind, that bunny-eared lady nodded,

“Oh, although the script was interesting too, yeah? Why, it was a nice scenario! It was an entertaining play that caused both laughter and tears! You could also sense the tastes of the person that was behind that arrangement of Cinderella – no, you could sense nothing but their tastes!”

and said that to herself while glowing with self-satisfaction.

She praised script highly, as if it was written by a genius scriptwriter.

Well, I mean, I certainly did personally think that it had quite an interesting story. And, judging from the positive audience reaction, it seemed that there were many people that felt the same way. Still, when she praises it to that extent, it felt like she was lying.

Or rather than saying that it sounded like a lie, perhaps it would be better to say that it sounded unnatural.

“Right? Don’t you think so too, Kumin?”

“Let’s see, I personally thought that it was a very good play~.”

...Huh?

Kumin-senpai talked normally to her. Normally – as in she was talking to her as if she was more than just an acquaintance, that sort of normal.

“Right~? Hideri too – Hideri? What’s wrong? Why are you hanging your head down like that?”

“.....”

Amaniji-senpai looked strange.

Her head was hanging down as if she was intentionally not raising her face so that their eyes couldn’t meet. And although this usually would be the time for her to start saying something weird, her mouth remained unopen.

After looking at that scene for some time, Kumin-senpai her voice loose.

“Come on, Hideri-chan. The person that you love the most has come, so raise your face properly.”

And with that rebuke, Amaniji-senpai raised her face at last.

Then, her mouth started to slowly open.

“Ah, um... C-cat...gi...rl...se...n...pai...”

Amaniji-senpai murmured her words out like that, bit by bit.

Although, as to whether the voice was an embarrassed or happy one, I could not tell – it was a voice that didn’t sound much like a voice.

That was how I heard her.

“Hey, wait a minute, I’m no longer that person more. That person no longer exists. I’m Bunnygirl-senpai now, so call me that! You’re already called me that before, right? Did you forget that already?”

As she said that, the bunny-eared lady stood right in front of Amaniji-senpai.

After that bunny-eared lady entered her field of view, I could see a faint glitter start to accumulate in Amaniji-senpai’s eyes. I did not know why Amaniji-senpai ended up like that – but as for that glimmer in her eye, I could tell that it was not as a result of sorrow.

I could at least tell that much.

That glimmer – it was a beautiful glimmer, a glimmer that was the exact opposite of a sorrowful glimmer.

“Heh heh heh, I’m a university student now, right? Unlike in the past, I’m more adulty now – you can only wear cat ears up until senior high, right?”

“...Ahaha, that’s right, that is how it is, sorry... “Bunnygirl-senpai”. ...Or rather, let’s talk about you coming here! Even though we had tried contacting you, you didn’t respond at all,

and although you said things like that you would come over to play post-graduation why have you not come over even once!”

Amaniji-senpai spoke with a rather restless voice.

It looked like the two of them were very close.

Like they were old friends.

Then, a thought that I had previously abandoned flashed back into my mind.

...Huh?

...Perhaps, could this person be her?

“Hey, um, Amaniji-senpai...?”

“Hm? What is it?”

Concerned about the thing that had accumulated in her eyes, Amaniji-senpai wiped her eyes with her hand before turning towards me.

“Um... Is this person her?”

“Right, this is Catgirl-senpai – no, Bunnygirl-senpai. Kumin and our upperclassman.”

“Err... Then, about that no longer here thing from before...?”

“Right, Catgirl-senpai is no longer here anymore. She’s Bunnygirl-senpai now.”

Amaniji-senpai grinned as she spoke in a tone that implied that what she had just said was extremely obvious.

Next to her, said Bunnygirl-senpai nodded along with Amaniji-senpai’s remarks as she added, “That’s right, since I’ve become more adulty, right?”

For an instant, my brain stopped working.

???

??????

Huh...?

“Err, then Catgirl-senpai is not deceased, or anything like that...?”

As my brain started to work again, I asked that question.

In response to that query of mine, Amaniji-senpai started at me blankly,

“Correct. She is alive and well. Well, but she’s Bunnygirl-senpai now. So what’s this about her being dead?”

and said that as she tilted her head.

The bunny-eared lady looked at me curiously too.

And, that in my mind I had sworn to do my utmost for the sake of said Bunnygirl-senpai whom I had killed off without permission: there was no way I could tell them that either.

But, then again – it wasn't like that was the only reason why I swore to myself to do my utmost in my mind.

Nevertheless, as expected, it wasn't like I could say that out loud.

Still, for things to be like this – to be honest, it was quite the pleasing fact.

Of course, it was only pleasing because I had made a selfish misunderstanding. But even so, the fact that she is alive and, above all, had praised us earlier, made me very happy.

She said that she found the play that we performed interesting.

That she was pleased with the play that was performed – that fact, it made me extremely happy.

Well, her over-the-top praise for the script was just her tooting her own horn, but I'll just turn a blind eye to that.

"Ahaha, as expected of the children who enter this club: you're all nothing but interesting kids. Whether it's Hideri or Kumin, you're both exceptionally excellent. And the underclassmen are, without exception, interesting kids, right?"

Bunnygirl-senpai looked in my direction as she smiled.

Apparently, it appears that I've been accepted by her as a strange underclassman.

Yeah... As expected, it was super embarrassing...

"U-um... Bunnygirl-senpai... see, Yuu-chan, DevTru Rikka-chan, and Sofia-chan, they have not joined the club –"

Before Amaniji-senpai could finish, Bunnygirl-senpai cut Amaniji-senpai off by talking over Amaniji-senpai's words with her own words.

As if there was no need for Amaniji-senpai to say any more on that matter.

Bunnygirl-senpai spoke over Amaniji-senpai gently.

"Yeah, I know. Everything about the story behind this play – I know."

"...Is that so?"

Amaniji-senpai responded softly, as if she were a little depressed.

"Don't be so down. Rather, sorry for being unable to control myself and for entering onstage with the behind-the-scenes character of the Great Demon King! But it was fun, teehee."

"Huh, that wasn't an ad-lib but a proper part of the play's setting!?"

Seeing Bunnygirl-senpai stick her tongue out in a timid manner made me retort unconsciously.

What an astonishing fact – Shichimiya’s ad-lib turned out to be real.

“Wow, Sofia’s amazing!”

“Nyahahaha, I too am surprised.”

Even the person herself was surprised. Of course.

“I mean, it was my script after all! Still, honestly, I’m glad that the play had been performed like this. To be able to see everyone’s performance – as well as being able to take this opportunity to perform as well – made me happy.”

“So that’s how you felt about it, thank goodness...”

Although her expression was a somewhat lonely and shadowy, relief leaked out of Amaniji-senpai.

Still, I too was also relieved to hear those words.

It wasn’t the same level of relief, however.

For me – I was just the helper.

The promise was just for me to ensure that the guerrilla play was, one way or another, was carried out – and it was kept.

As for Amaniji-senpai and Kumin-senpai, surely things weren’t that simple for them.

To them, the play wasn’t something that could be reduced to something so simple.

It was the very last one – that’s why.

Things that they regretted – surely, they had something like that.

“That’s right, so there’s no need to get so down, Hideri. Hideri did nothing wrong, and of course, Kumin did nothing wrong. You performed the play well.”

Bunnygirl-senpai spoke as if she saw through what Amaniji-senpai was feeling.

That’s why, there’s no need to worry about it – once more, Bunnygirl-senpai told Amaniji-senpai that gently.

“Right, ‘the final play’ – that was what this was to you, wasn’t it? It was very good. Thank you so very much for performing it with my script.”

It was fantastic.

Wrapping things up with those words, Bunnygirl-senpai patted Amaniji-senpai on her head.

“To tell the truth, I originally made this club for the sake of creating something fun for me to do at this school. To have people gather together for me like this and to have been

given the chance to enjoy myself one last time: don't you think that this is the most wonderful way for things to end?"

That's why.

It was not something that you had no choice but to do.

There is nothing for you to regret.

So please don't feel remorseful.

Cheers for your hard work – and thank you.

To ensure that her message was clearly understood, Bunnygirl-senpai spoke those lines one after the other.

Taken aback by those words, Amaniji-senpai became bashful.

"Bunnygirl-senpai –"

As she murmured that, Amaniji-senpai's face – it appeared that it was packed full with all the emotions she currently was feeling.

Feelings of happiness, feelings of relief, feelings of thankfulness, feelings of sorrow, feelings of loneliness, feelings of teariness – there were all there.

Even so, she was smiling.

A smile that expressed all those feelings at once; a very wonderful smile.

Ah.

I – from the bottom of my heart, I was glad that I helped out with this play.

Regardless of my selfish misunderstanding.

The fact that I wanted to help her out did not change.

"Yeah, and with this, our club activities have come to a satisfactory close!"

If Amaniji-senpai was pleased.

If the members of the drama club were pleased.

If everybody was pleased.

Although there was an unexpected twist at the end.

A dramatic twist.

It was a wonderful stroke of fate that had brought us together for this wonderful week.

Final Chapter: The Cultural Festival Afterparty is a New Beginning

After the Mysterious Rainbow Incident (self-titled) chain of strange occurrences, I got laughed at by Nibutani.

It was the Sunday after the end of the cultural festival.

The principal had organised for a cultural festival afterparty (although it seemed that it was intended to be the usual surprise by our principal given that it was not on the programme, as it had already become common knowledge it was not particularly surprising), and so after having tidied up the school during the day the entire student body had come to the school's sports ground afterwards to celebrate the end with a bonfire.

On the account that the event was being held on Sunday, participation for this event was optional. However, it seemed that most of the student body was participating, as the sports ground was overflowing with people.

Although this was only the first cultural festival I've had since entering high school – I enjoyed myself quite a bit.

The first years who were strongly moved as it was their first time experiencing something like this, the second years who surely had not yet had their fill of their second cultural festival, the third years who were regretting that this was their last cultural festival; everyone enjoyed the afterparty.

A musical medley that made people want to dance played throughout the sports ground.

And in the centre of the sports ground, a tall flame soared high into the sky.

In that blazing hot atmosphere, there were people around the fire dancing whilst wearing costumes that were used during the cultural festival, and people who chatted while looking at that scene from a little distance away.

Aside from the areas around the swaying flame, there were also worn-out people looking down at that scene from inside the school building.

Even the people who had been busy with the management of the afterparty.

And on the newly set-up main stage trying to perform something, the principal (!?).

Various people enjoyed the end of the school's biggest event in their own way.

Naturally, I was one of those people too.

Although I had been chatting away with Isshiki a short distance away from the fire just moments ago – no, it would be more accurate to say that I was accompanying Isshiki with his hobby of "observing girls dancing around the fire" (not my hobby!) – it appeared that he had work to do as a member of the disciplinary committee –

“Now then, it’s about time for me to take off and check if there are any scoundrels that have cut themselves too loose. However, to be able to see the entire student cohort, no, the entire female population of students gathered here together is enough for me to have my fill of the afterparty. Togashi, I leave the rest to you. Well then, later.”

With those words, Isshiki headed off to work (as well as his hobby).

And so, I was currently by myself.

I enjoyed myself by watching Rikka, who was wearing her costume from yesterday’s play, and Kazari-chan, who was wearing Rikka’s worn-out costume from the play, looking close to each other and dancing together in the distance.

...I wasn’t feeling particularly lonely or anything.

It was at such a time.

“The moment I thought that you stopped doing things like that in public, you’re alone by yourself ogling her to get sexually aroused, you creep!”

Along with those words, striking me from behind with a punch on the shoulder, delightfully – in an extremely good mood that I’ve never seen her in before, I got entangled with Nibutani.

Her face was so visibly flushed that it made me think that she was drunk, but it appeared that the red glow was simply from the glare from the fire and not as a result of alcohol.

I was suspicious as to whether she was drunk for an instant as she was in too much of a good mood.

Then again, it was the end of the festival, so I guess anyone would be in a good mood.

However, I have to wonder, why was she all alone?

If it were like usual, Nibutani would be together with the two other dance club members. Furthermore, if it’s the popular Nibutani, in a festive environment like this she would be in great demand by many people.

“I do not do stuff like that, I am a very wholesome person.”

There were many things that I was curious about, but for the time being I denied that I was undergoing some kind of sexual play.

Denied both that I was currently doing, and that I was the sort of person to do, stuff like that.

“Hmm, but you were grinning. With a face that seemed to say, ‘I wonder if this means Kazari-chan is also my girlfriend?’.”

“Oi, stop it! Don’t joke about my earnestness! Never once had something like that ever crossed my mind!”

Don't joke about that!

What if someone happened to hear that? Rumours hurt!

"Ahaha, well, I guess that's true. Geruzoni has a cute, cute girlfriend after all. By the way, yesterday's play: it was super hilarious! Why, I already want to say it so badly that I can't help myself! That 'you burned?', when Geruzoni says it's super cool!"

As Nibutani said all that, she held her stomach, and although there were quite a number of people around us, she laughed out loud without caring about the surrounding gazes.

A jovial, delighted, satisfied, loud laugh.

"Um... That's a bit too much laughter... It's just a line from the play..."

"A, ahahahaha! 'For the Prince's fiery kiss?' Ahahahaha, you should go die! Go die! Stop, ahahaha!"

...Was it really that funny... If so, then I guess it's fine...

What.

Embarrassing as it is, as she was laughing way too much about it, it made me feel like that I had made her laugh, which made me feel less bad about it.

Even now, whilst panting, Nibutani continued to laugh with difficulty.

"Ha, ha...! Why, just thinking about it makes me explode with laughter! You were so self-confident! It was definitely way more interesting to watch than an unskillful skit!"

"Wow. I'm so happy to hear that. Thanks for the complement."

After I had said thanks in a sarcastic tone, Nibutani at last raised her tear-filled face.

Hmm, if it got you laughing to this extent, I'll remind you of this one day to get you laughing like this again.

"Ha, I laughed and laughed. Well, see you around."

"You came just to laugh at me!? You're too spiteful!"

"Ah, sorry, sorry. I laughed so much that I forgot. See, I come over to thank you for your hard work during the cultural festival."

Returning, Nibutani turned back to look at me with a face that said that she had forgotten the reason why she had come here in the first place.

After that, she moved back towards me a little and once again repeated the words that she had said just moments ago.

"The cultural festival, thank you for your hard work. Congratulation, it was a huge success."

Unlike before, when she was laughing hard, there was no malice – Nibutani’s words were accompanied by a child-like smile.

This too was also an expression that I’ve never seen Nibutani have before.

“Yeah, you too, thanks for your hard work. ...Well, but as for us boys, we merely watched the performance, or at best only played a small supportive role, so I’m not sure we’re deserving of thanks...”

“That’s not true at all. After all, it’s only because everyone helped everyone enjoy the show that our performance was a success.”

“...Yeah, if Nibutani says so, then I guess it’s true. I had a good time, and it appeared that everyone did too.”

“That’s right, that’s right, soy sauce⁶³.”

“That pun is still popular!?”

“Hm? Would it be better if I said, ‘That’s right, that’s right, it’s sauce!’⁶⁴?”

“Why would you bring up something as old as that!?”

On a related note, Rikka too had said something like that just the other day. Was this a thing that had become a fad among the girls!?

Nevertheless, to hear something like that from Nibutani... It was the sort of gag that made me doubt my ears, but it may have been the place known as the cultural festival afterparty influenced her to do so.

...Let’s say that it was due to something like that.

Otherwise, I wouldn’t be able to grasp the character of the current Nibutani.

“Or rather, Nibutani: are you, by any chance, going around and telling everyone those words?”

“Yeah, that’s right. You’re the last one, Geruzoni. I wanted to thank everyone for their hard work. Although I guess it is a bit of a strange thing for me to say, given the success of the play was the result of everyone’s hard work.”

The flame was still burning strong.

⁶³ Untranslatable pun and cultural reference. Here, the phrase そういうこと (sou iu koto), which in this case roughly translates to ‘exactly’, sounds like 醤油こと (shouyuukoto), which means soy sauce. This is a gag by the actor and entertainer Murakami Shoji.

⁶⁴ Another untranslatable pun/cultural reference. Here, it’s playing on the fact that そうだよ (souda yo), which roughly translates to ‘that’s right’, sounds like ソースだよ (sousuda yo), which roughly translates to “it’s sauce”. [This pun was used in an ad for Yakisoba in 1984.](#)

That's why, Nibutani's face still looked as if it had been dyed bright red. However, her expression after saying that line just now was different from how it was from before: it was an embarrassed expression.

Surely, our entire class had saw her with this expression. And surely, everyone else felt the same way as that I did.

That out of our entire class, Nibutani was the one who had worked the hardest.

That's why, I too voiced my thoughts out to Nibutani.

"I see. But, Nibutani was the one who had worked the hardest, so we should be the ones who are thanking you."

As if catching her by surprise, Nibutani's eyes widened in response to my words. She then tried to hide her embarrassment by twirling her long hair around her finger.

"Ahaha, if you say so. I'm happy to hear that you feel that way. Thank you."

While still fumbling her hair with her finger, Nibutani smiled happily.

As she smiled, her cheeks were dyed not by a red caused by the illumination of the fire, but by a pastel red.

Afterwards, she closed her eyes, and went "right, right" with a nod – although I wasn't sure what it was that she was convinced of, Nibutani met my line of sight,

"Well, there willll be a class closing party for the play after this finishes, so please come and join us."

and said that.

Then, without waiting to hear my reply, she once again turned around and walked away whilst waving to me with the back of her hand.

'I don't need to hear your reply' – was it?

Well, I mean, it goes without saying, but if there is to be a closing party, then naturally my reply would be that I'm going.

For her to know that – it was like the two of us could understand each other a little even without words, which made me feel a little happy.

After following Nibutani's retreating figure with my eyes until it was gone, I returned my attention back towards where Rikka was. When I did so, however, a close-up of someone's face entered into my field of vision, appearing right before my eyes.

"Yuu-chan, you're quite popular with the ladies, aren't you? Since we didn't have any other choice, we thought that we would go with DevTru Rikka-chan, but it seems that DevTru Rikka-chan was also quite popular, and so we didn't know who would be good to go out with."

Full of flair, and with the distinctiveness of the colours of the rainbow – it was Amaniji-senpai.

Although her face was covered by a pitch-black shadow given that her back was facing the fire, as she was way too close to me I could clearly see every nook and cranny of her well-featured face.

I was helpless against the gaze of her large pupils, which rooted me in place. Although I couldn't get myself to move despite physically being able to do so, I somehow managed to take a single step back.

"Huh? ...No, um... what about Kumin-senpai?"

"Kumin said, 'Eh, Hideri-chan's definitely the type of person who is too bothersome to be in a romantic relationship with, so nah~, ' and turned me down."

Ha, laughed Amaniji-senpai as tears accumulated in her eye.

She was on the verge of tears.

The things that Kumin-senpai said – while I also thought that what she had said was undeniably accurate and correct, all the same I couldn't help but feel sympathy for Amaniji-senpai.

Then again, it was likely because that they were friends that Kumin-senpai was able to say what she really thought.

Or rather: did she really ask her out, this upperclassman? ...As expected, the strangeness of her actions really does surpass even my wildest dreams.

"Moreover, we also got told, 'Besides, I only see Hideri-chan as just a friend.'"

"Those words, that's the most common way of being rejected!"

"I love Hideri-chan, but...' followed after as well."

"I just want to say, if you love her don't reject her!"

"As well as, 'Since Hideri-chan is kind...'"

"Because you're kind, what!?' is how I feel about that!"

"In addition, all this was via text."

"Even though it wasn't face-to-face, being being told this all via back-to-back short texts is still depressing!"

Before I knew it, it became the standard rejection story.

It was a mystery as to how much of that exchange was true.

On top of that, I had no idea what the point of that story was... She as quite the schemer, after all. Then again, perhaps it was all just a joke.

“Well, in any case it was just a joke.”

“...Can Amaniji-senpai not cure herself of the ‘I cannot live if I don’t tell a joke’ disease?”

“Hmm, if you say that you want to see that kind of us, then we’ll rehabilitate ourself.”

...Let me have a think about it.

I do want to see a rehabilitated Amaniji-senpai, but at the same time I feel that I wouldn’t be able to bear the sight of an Amaniji-senpai who doesn’t jest. People shouldn’t be changing like that so easily.

“I guess it’s best if Amaniji-senpai stays like Amaniji-senpai after all.”

“Ahaha, you’re embarrassing us. It is that, it is not? ‘We are crazy in the head’ is a compliment, right? Yay!”

“Although I didn’t phrase it as terribly as that, please don’t be putting yourself down, and please don’t be embarrassed by your own words!”

“As expected, Amaniji-senpai’s quite the weirdo.”

“Don’t say that either, Amaniji-senpai!”

And don’t get even more embarrassed!

As expected, Amaniji-senpai’s quite the weirdo.

...I wonder if I’ve made you satisfied with this exchange...

As if she had read my mind, Amaniji-senpai let out a content grin.

And then – she stood next to me, silently.

The two of us watched everyone who was dancing around the fire – the two of us watched Rikka.

“As the cultural festival has also ended, this is it for the club activities of the Eccentric Drama Club.”

Said Amaniji-senpai quietly.

Those words, they seemed somewhat lonely, and somewhat – somewhat sad.

This event marked the end of the club, so of course she was feeling sad.

“...Yes, that’s right.”

“But, since Bunnygirl-senpai too was pleased, we too are okay with this being the end. Either way, with the cultural festival now over, there’s just about no events for us to perform anything at – it’s just about perfect for things to have ended here, right?”

“Amaniji-senpai...”

I wasn't able to say the words "I agree".

To say those words would be to accept it – that is, to accept that our time together as a club was over.

Although it had only been a week's worth of activities, it was still difficult to accept that this was the end of it all.

But even though I didn't want to admit it out loud, reality continued to flow – even if I didn't want to admit it, it would still end.

I didn't want to admit it, since I wished that somehow or other, things could continue like this for just a little longer.

Whilst I kept thinking of thoughts like that, the cultural festival too had come to its end.

Still – the end must come someday.

That's why, not wanting to admit that fact with words – was just merely me being selfish.

As if seeing through my mind, Amaniji-senpai looked in my direction with a smile.

Cheer up – her smile seemed to be telling me.

"Ahaha, Yuu-chan's also the type to get caught up by sentimentality? Well, whenever anything comes to its end, it feels lonely, doesn't it?"

"....."

"But, while it feels lonely – only because there is an end, can there be a next, right?"

"Yes, that's right, isn't it?"

It was clumsy, but at last I was able to say the words "yes, that's right".

...I guess that something like that is true.

It was the truth of the world; it was how the world functioned.

Once a thing had ended and had been judged as having reached its end – a next is sought for.

But, there also are things that are able to have no endpoint.

Since I swore to myself to never let my relationship with Rikka come to an end, I resolved myself to do whatever it takes to keep our relationship from ending. Until death do us part – I won't let it end.

That was the lengths I was willing to go to ensure that it never ends. That it was a tale with no end.

Then, for these club activities, perhaps –

“Yuu-chan, the day after tomorrow’s the sports festival, right?”

“...Huh? Ah, yes, that sounds about right. Tomorrow’s the preparations and rehearsal day for the sports festival, with the sports festival itself being in two day’s time.”

“As for us, we want to participate in the inter-club relay.”

“...Eh?”

“Well, look: if we participate in the inter-club relay, it’ll be recorded in the yearbook, right?”

“H-ha.”

“Therefore!”

In an over-the-top manner that matched the ‘ta-da!’ sound effect perfectly, Amaniji-senpai thrust her hand right in front of my eyes.

She was grasping a piece of paper in her left hand – a club enrolment form.

On it, the words ‘Far Eastern Magical Napping Society (tentative)’ had been newly written.

“Since the Eccentric Drama Club disbanded yesterday, the new ‘Far Eastern Magical Napping Society (tentative)’ was made! By the way, Kumin was the one who thought of the club name! And with that said, you should join too, Yuu-chan!”

As that piece of paper fluttered around before my eyes, Amaniji-senpai let out a lighthearted smile as she spoke.

Then, as if to peek at my reaction: with half her face covered by the form, she peeped at me, gazing at me motionlessly.

“HAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!?”

I was so blown away by how rapid that development was that I let out a strange sound in a loud voice.

Well, I was glad that everyone was watching the flames – if it were like usual, letting out such a hysterically loud sound would have resulted in everybody looking at me with strange eyes... Combined with the fact that I had let out a similar loud sound yesterday, I worry that I’ll be perceived as that sort of character...

“Yep, that’s the reaction we wanted from you. It’s a little normal, but we expected that from Yuu-chan!”

“Eh...? Then, you’re not joking about this, are you?”

“Yeah. ...To tell you the truth: with DevTru Rikka-chan, there was that thing about us listening to any of her three requests, right? For everyone to do something together again – that was what she requested of us.”

“...Rikka, huh?”

“That’s why, we were thinking about how we could deal with that request. And so, we came up with this: to participate in the sports festival’s inter-club relay. And everyone can dress eccentrically. Although we have not thought of any particular club activities for us to do yet, for the time being we’ve applied for setting up a club as the principal wanted to be photographed for the yearbook; when we asked the principal about it, the principal replied with, ‘Yes! I too want to be photographed! Of course I’ll be the adviser!’ and agreed to be our adviser.”

“Wow... That’s the principal for you...”

“Just now, we asked Kumin and Sofia-chan regarding this and got their agreement instantly, and so we were told ‘approved’ as we had just the right number of people for forming a club! All that’s left is Yuu-chan and DevTru Rikka-chan! Yay yay! Now now, Yuu-chan, what’s your reply?”

“I –”

I already had my answer.

It was why I had hoped that things could continue on for just a little longer.

Still, I felt that it would be embarrassing to reply right away.

It was like she had, somehow or other, seen right through my feelings.

No, it was more like that she had already seen though how I truly felt about it.

“I-it’s not like I have any particular interest in the inter-club relay or anything, but well, if Rikka’s joining.”

...With my face concealed and mumbling, I gave those tsundere⁶⁵-like lines.

It was the only thing that came to my mind when I was thinking of ways to distract from my embarrassment. If I may say so myself, it was quite the sorry display.

“But, are you fine with this? Especially with the state of the Eccentric Drama Club. But, if you’re fine with it, then, well...”

“Yeah, we’re fine with it. Besides, Bunnygirl-senpai too: regarding club activities, she had said to put an end to them. That’s why, we had to give the club a proper and neat end. That’s why it’s fine, and why there’s no need for worry!”

“...I see.”

“Heh heh, although we try our best to not let things end, it’s fine if it ends neatly, right?”

⁶⁵ A Japanese term for a character archetype whose normally cold at first to others before showing a kinder side.

Amaniji-senpai continued to be cheerful as she spoke.

“But, once a thing ends, it can be begun anew!”

Those words – I personally thought that they were very great words.

To never stop putting in effort – to not let the tale end.

In addition to that, to begin putting effort in – once a tale ends, it also means that there is a new tale to begin.

I’m sure that this was what Rikka wished for as well.

For the tale to not end, and for the tale to begin anew.

“Ah, Rikka’s finally by herself! Let’s go, Yuu-chan!”

– That’s why.

Like Amaniji-senpai said.

Following the happy ending the story continues – it begins anew.

I wonder if there will be a new beginning once again after this.

Although where and what have yet to be decided upon.

With this new club.

Our tale is still far from over.

Without a doubt, I’m certain that tale of ours will be fun.

Afterword

It's been a despair-inducing long time. This is the non-existent author, Torako. A very great thing that has happened is that someone like me is on Wikipedia and is listed on the Wikipedia page for novelists with pen names! A masked writer! Cool!

Since it was a certain Spiritual Wave Fist Master-like⁶⁶, I think I'll introduce myself from now on as the masked writer like Wikipedia.

Putting that all aside, to everyone who currently has the third volume of *Chuunibyou Demo Koi ga Shitai!* in their hands: seriously, thank you so much. Even though the anime was lovely, for you to then go and pick up a copy of the novel too... You are all nothing but kind-hearted people. It is thanks to the support of kind-hearted people that volume three was able to come out. Thanks to everyone who did their utmost to make the anime amazing. The voice actors were all wonderful. ZAQ-san's song was lovely. Thanks to Ousaka-san for drawing cute illustrations as always. Thanks to the editorial staff who guided the dejected me.

It was thanks to having received a large deal of help in from these people that there is a volume three.

I had previously without hesitation said "anime~" before, but for it to be made into an animated work! And for it to be made into a movie! And for a second season to have also started! All this too was entirely due to the large efforts of people who weren't me.

How do I put it: it's fine to feel that it was out of the ordinary even though this report was completely ex post facto, right? Hooray!

It was forcibly linked to the story of third volume, but I hope you enjoyed the same "chuunibyou is the best!" as with the previous volumes.

This time the chuunibyou patients again made their appearance a little differently, as both that the number of characters had doubled from the previous two volumes, and that the main focus of this volume was to be comedy. In anime terms, this volume was sort of like a season 2. The direction the anime went with naming it *Chuunibyou Demo Koi ga Shitai! Ren* was super cool, so I've decided to name mine *Chuunibyou Demo Koi ga Shitai! ~Love Bomber~*. ...It's tacky.

Back to the story, while in the previous volumes the ratio was 80% love 20% comedy, this time it was 80% comedy 20% love. Since I don't want to raise the bar too high for myself (I wish I could learn from Kumin-senpai!), it'd make me pleased if this volume made you laugh even just a little bit more than usual. If it were the case that you didn't enjoy this

⁶⁶ This, along with the previous lines, references Genkai from Yu Yu Hakusho: specifically, the fact that in one of the later arcs, she had fought in a tournament under the guise of the 'Masked Fighter'. I kept it a little awkward in English so that this reference could be maintained.

volume that much, please try and enjoy this volume by converting things like Rikka's cuteness into animated form in the best animation style you can think of in your head!

On a related note, in the third volume the wildly popular Deko-chan and Kumin-senpai from the anime appear!

Quite often, I get told the words, "Neither Deko-chan nor senpai were in the original work." It was thoughts like "the original work's ●●●" that drove the creation of these new words. It wasn't as a result of thinking something like "I wouldn't have to hear those painful words as much", honest! No, since I personally loved them too, I was glad that I was able to have a chat with the both of them. Deko-chan's appearance was quite forced though... Although I wanted to also write the story about the encounter with Deko-chan, I'm not sure if that dream of mine will ever come true! Nevertheless, now I've got a new dream!

Well, while lots of characters appear in the third volume, since at the centre of it all is the abnormal upperclassman known as Amaniji-senpai and the resultant misunderstanding of the highest order that arose from the tale of her continuing to be abnormal, correction – I'd hope that you enjoy the tale called Cinderella (?), a story of a girl in love.

At the same time, I'll be very glad if you could enjoy the anime as well. No, that's misleading, isn't it? The anime is a blast, so please don't miss it! I'm certain that it'll be lovey-dovey. I too am looking forward to how the anime will turn out.

Blurb

Please hand over your lover! – kneeling in broad daylight, Amaniji Hideri.

She was a member of the Eccentric Drama Club.

Her wish is to have the Eccentric Drama Club perform a play at the school festival, but the club only had two members.

And so she asked Rikka and others for help.

The director's strange, the members are strange, the club name's strange, the contents of the play are strange, the rehearsals are strange – it's nothing but strange, will the play even happen!?